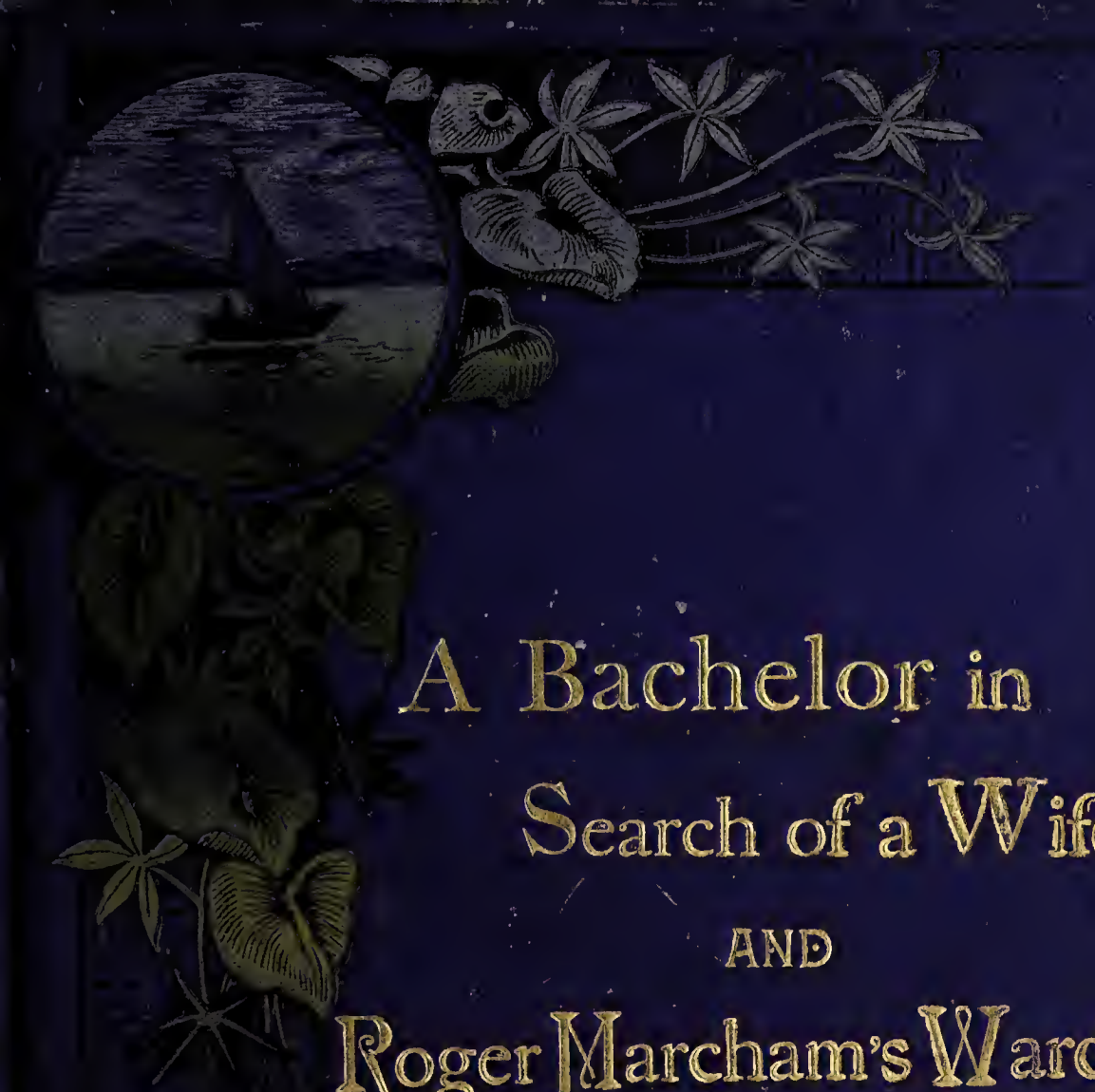


A Bachelor in Search of a Wife

AND

Roger Marcham's Ward

A BACHELOR
IN SEARCH OF A WIFE.



A BACHELOR IN SEARCH OF A WIFE,

AND

ROGER MARCHAM'S WARD.

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN,

AUTHOR OF "ACROSS HER PATH," "ALDERSYDE," ETC.



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A BACHELOR IN SEARCH OF A WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

BY POST.

BETWEEN eight and nine o'clock on a raw November morning in London, a young man was breakfasting alone in his lodging-house parlour. It was a grimy, dingy apartment, shabby to the last degree, and smelling mustily of tobacco and smoke; but, as there is a certain comfort in familiarity, Richard Heath thought it a very comfortable place indeed, and did not feel himself at all aggrieved because fortune had given him nothing better for a home. He was a happy young fellow, who took the world as he found it, and managed, in spite of poor circumstances, and the dearth of what to all human beings are the precious things of life, to look upon existence with a kindly eye. If he had few comforts, he had no cares; if his salary were meagre enough for his needs, it at least brought no responsibilities with it. He was an orphan, and, as far as he knew, a friendless orphan, but his sad estate had not

made him either a morose or a melancholy man. He had even been heard to say lightly and with a smile to the music teacher who lodged on the upper floor, that "he considered himself very well off in that respect, because relations so often bored a fellow." The music teacher had not said anything in reply. She was an orphan, too, but a woman regards these things differently. As far as sentiment is concerned, men and women must agree to differ. In matters of affection a woman occupies entirely different ground. The heart is her kingdom, and when she is cheated of that, there is very little worth the having left to her in this world.

There were times when Mary Powell, the music governess in the Misses Craddock's boarding school, felt life to be intolerably hard; and at these times the philosophical cheerfulness of Mr. Richard Heath grated upon her; and her usual quiet self-control was ruffled to the extent of making her a little sarcastic at Mr. Heath's expense. But, on the whole, they were very good friends, and they had lodged in the same house for four years.

Mr. Richard Heath was a book-keeper in a mercantile establishment in Holborn, and did not require to be at his desk till ten o'clock. He was sitting at his coffee that morning with his newspaper spread out before him, and one foot on the table when he heard Miss Powell go downstairs. She had to be at her post at nine o'clock. "She 's late," said Mr. Heath to himself. "Poor little soul! She has a hard time of it. I don't wonder she 's sarcastic. If I were in her place I 'd make use of bad language, I believe."

Mr. Heath took another mouthful of his coffee, a bite of his leathery toast, and continued his reading of a Socialist demonstration which had taken place in Hyde Park the previous evening, and just then he heard the postman's ring. It did not excite him at all, it being a very rare occurrence for a communication by post to be left for Mr. Richard Heath. He was therefore justifiably surprised when the little maid, who attended to the second floor lodgers, presently appeared with a formidable looking blue envelope lying on a little black tray, which she offered to him with a very perceptible grin. Mr. Heath accepted it with a lofty indifference, and did not offer to open it until the domestic had left the room. Then he took out his small paper-cutter and slit up the envelope with great precision, though his heart beat a trifle quickly as he noted the very official-looking contents within. It was a very brief and quite unsatisfactory communication after all, although calculated to arouse the liveliest curiosity and speculation. It ran thus :—

"LINCOLN'S INN, 14*th November*, 1881.

"SIR,—As we have information of the utmost importance to communicate to you, we should be greatly obliged if you would call at our office at your very earliest convenience. We shall remain at your service to-morrow morning between the hours of ten and twelve, when we hope to see you. In matters of this kind a personal interview is much more satisfactory than correspondence by letter. We trust therefore you will excuse the liberty we take in

asking you to call.—We are, yours respectfully,

"WYNYARD, GLAZEBROOK & BILTON.

"Richard Heath, Esq."

"Now then," said Mr. Richard Heath aloud, and with great deliberation, as he read the letter for the fifth time. "What do you suppose is the meaning of this?" As nobody volunteered an answer to this questioning soliloquy Mr. Heath got up, and again he strode up and down the floor. He was greatly mystified, and might have been alarmed, only the tone of the letter was so entirely respectful that it gave him confidence. He knew the name of the firm very well, since the house which employed him had engaged them more than once on some intricate law business, and Richard himself had been in their office more than once. He tried to quench his sanguine imaginations with the theory that they might wish to see him on business connected with his own firm, although his common sense told him at the same time that nothing could be more unlikely. He pulled out his watch—twenty minutes past nine, time he was preparing to go out. Instead of pulling on his boots as usual in a hurry, and rushing out, Mr. Heath went back to his bedroom and took a survey of his personal appearance in the mirror, having first lit the gas, in order that nothing might escape him. It struck him all of a sudden that his coat was very shabby, that it glistened at the seams; also that his necktie was slightly frayed on the edges. In short, he conceived a sudden disgust at himself, and, throwing off his coat, opened his trunk and took out his Sunday

clothes. All this was quite unnecessary, for if his clothes were a little shabby, he did not look the less gentlemanly in them, and his face, with its clear grey eye, was as pleasant and honest a face as you want to see anywhere. But our young bachelor was not at all vain. He looked very smart indeed in his well-made Sunday coat, tasteful necktie and immaculate linen, but after he had surveyed himself for a minute in this changed garb, he addressed himself with scornful bitterness as a "jolly fool," put on his shabby coat again, and returned to the sitting-room for his boots. By the time he was ready to leave the house it was a quarter to ten. Usually he smoked his morning cigar on his way to Holborn, but when he put his hand in his pocket he found he had forgotten his case, but he did not miss it much, the letter in his breast pocket being sufficient to engage his attention as he walked. When he reached the counting-house, instead of going at once to his desk, he proceeded to the governors' room. Only one of the partners was there—Mr. Bentley, the head of the firm. He gave the accountant a nod, and pointed to a chair, while he continued the perusal of his letters. "You're sharp, Mr. Heath," he said, presently. "I'm not quite ready for you."

"I wanted to speak to you about my own affairs, sir," said Mr. Heath, quietly. The principal looked round in surprise. He knew the accountant's circumstances, and was not prepared to hear that he had any affairs. "Will you read this letter, sir?" continued Mr. Heath, as he produced the envelope. "It came this morning. What do you suppose it means, sir?"

Mr. Bentley laid down his own letter and ran his eyes over the document the accountant handed to him.

"I'm sure I can't say, Richard, unless it means you have come into a fortune. Any rich relation, eh?"

"Not that I am aware of, sir—I haven't a relation in the world."

"Well, it is certainly mysterious. You had better go round now, and get yourself put out of suspense. I'll be quite curious to learn the result."

"It probably won't amount to much, sir," said Richard, with a smile. "But, as I don't owe any money, and never injured anybody to my knowledge, I need not be nervous about it. Shall I go before I attend to the letters, sir?"

"Certainly. Walters can see to them. Off you go!"

Richard Heath was conscious of a growing excitement as he left the familiar warehouses and took his way briskly towards Lincoln's Inn. He presented himself at the chambers of Messrs. Wynyard, Glazebrook & Bilton at half-past ten, and on giving his name was immediately admitted to a large, airy, well-furnished apartment, in which were two gentlemen, who received him with great cordiality. The elder of the pair, quite an old man, though his eye was still keen and clear, looked at him with close and curious scrutiny.

"Mr. Bilton and I are extremely glad that you have lost no time in calling," he said pleasantly. "I am Mr. Glazebrook, at your service. I wonder now, if you have the slightest idea of

the nature of the communication we have to make to you."

"I have not, indeed," replied Richard, sincerely; then with a smile he added, "I hope it is something to my advantage."

"Very much so," said the young partner, speaking for the first time. "We have the pleasure to inform you that you have come into a very considerable estate, Mr. Heath."

Richard reddened and then grew pale.

"Indeed," he said, with a stammer, "I am very much surprised. Are you sure there is no mistake. Positively, I don't know anybody who would be likely to leave me anything."

"There is no mistake if you are Richard Heath, son of Joseph Heath, a bank teller, who was married to Dorothy Meyrick, of Winchelsea, Herts."

"That's right enough," murmured Richard, gaining a little more confidence. "But for all that I never knew I had any relatives in the world."

"Did you never hear of your mother's brother, Paul Meyrick, who emigrated to America about forty years ago."

"I've heard of him, of course, but we all believed him to be dead. My mother never heard of him after he went away.

"Well, he died in Quebec about two months ago, and you are his sole heir to sixty thousand dollars, and real estate in the Dominion amounting to double that sum."

"But how in all the world did he know of my existence!" gasped Richard, paling again with his intense excitement.

"He made it his business to find out indirectly.

His agent in Montreal communicated with us about five months ago, and we gave them all the information we could collect about you, sir."

"That was very kind of you," said Richard, with a kind of comical resignation. "Then has he nobody of his own?"

"Nobody; he never married," responded Mr. Glazebrook, while Mr. Bilton turned aside with a broad grin.

"There is a condition attached to your inheritance—we will show you a copy of the will presently, Mr. Heath," continued the senior partner.

"I hope it's a condition I can fulfil," said Richard, bluntly.

"I should think there would be no difficulty about that," said Mr. Glazebrook, with a smile. "Mr. Meyrick having evidently felt and regretted the loneliness of a bachelor life, wished to make sure that you would not suffer in the same way. The condition upon which you inherit his estate is a very simple one: only that you take a wife within twelve months from this date."

CHAPTER II.

AN INTERESTING INTERVIEW.

BOTH the lawyers looked keenly at their young client as this interesting announcement was made to him. If they expected him to look conscious, as became a man who would have no objection to a speedy marriage, they were mistaken. Richard only laughed a hearty laugh, full of unrestrained amusement.

"What a funny old chap he must have been, to be sure!" he said. "But, gentlemen, did he really put that down soberly in his will?"

"Quite soberly," Mr. Bilton made answer, as he brought a large folded paper from the depths of the safe. "This is a copy of the will; it is a very original document, I assure you. Mr. Paul Meyrick must have been quite a character."

The will was, indeed, a document of a unique kind, containing no unnecessary clauses, its wording unmistakably clear and to the point:—

"I leave everything I have in the world, after my lawful debts are paid, to my sister Dorothy's son, upon condition that he marries a wife in twelve months from the time at which he becomes acquainted with the contents of this will. If he does not fulfil this condition, I leave

the half of my estate to the General Hospital in Quebec, and the other half to Ursuline Chaudière, daughter of Pierre Chaudière, notary in Pont Levis—her mother will know why. I hope, however, that Richard Heath will not be such a fool as to let this money slip through his fingers. PAUL MEYRICK."

"It's a queer business altogether," said Richard Heath, after he had carefully read the contents of his uncle's will. "Isn't it curiously worded, Mr. Glazebrook? Is there no flaw in it?"

"None whatever. Its simplicity is unimpeachable. We can only congratulate you, Mr. Heath, and re-echo the hope embodied in the closing words of your uncle's will."

Richard laughed a little, though in a less unrestrained manner than before.

"I should think, if the latest statistics concerning the population are correct, there should be no difficulty in finding a wife in twelve months."

"That will be the easiest part of your obligation, I should think. Mr. Bilton, we have forgotten the codicil. Read it to Mr. Heath. You see, it provides you with funds for the period of probation—five hundred pounds, I think; most considerate of Mr. Meyrick."

"Very, seeing my modest income would not admit of my travelling far in search of a wife," said Richard, gaily. "In spite of the disappointment it will be to the hospital authorities at Quebec, and to the young lady with the French name, I doubt there is small chance of the money slipping through *my* fingers."

"Well, we are glad to hear it," said Mr. Glazebrook. "And we trust that at a very early date you will authorise us to realise Mr. Meyrick's estate."

"It cannot be touched then until the condition is fulfilled?"

"No. Mr. Meyrick left instructions with his agent in Montreal that the furrier's business was to be carried on under its present manager until, by the fulfilment of his condition, you should have the right to dispose of it as you think fit."

"It is a most extraordinary business altogether," said Richard, musingly. "I hope it is not all a myth."

"You will soon realise it, Mr. Heath. What do you intend to do then?"

"In the meantime I'd better go back to my work, gentlemen, and think over the thing quietly. I'll look in soon and tell you what I have decided."

So, with a cordial good-morning, they parted, and Richard Heath walked along the busy streets, wholly oblivious of everything going on around him. He was provided with food for thought for days to come. He acquainted Mr. Bentley of what he had just received, and then went to his desk, determined to attend to his work for that day at least, and keep his imagination from running riot. It required a superhuman effort, however, for between the figures, the curious words of the will, and the quaint, foreign-sounding name, Ursuline Chaudière, would rise up, and everything seemed a jumble it was impossible to make straight. But he stuck manfully to his desk,

and managed to put in an average day's work. He went to Mr. Bentley's room before that gentleman left, and asked him to look out for another accountant. He had taken a sudden resolve, which, however, he did not divulge, but merely said, with a dry, amused smile, that he would need to set out in search of a wife without delay.

It rained as Richard Heath walked through the dingy street to his lodgings in Theobald's Road, but he did not mind that; he was glad to be out of doors in any sort of weather. He felt as if he needed room to think. He saw the light in the music teacher's room as he neared the door, and his face brightened.

"I 'll go up after dinner and see her, the very thing. She 's so sensible, she 'll put me in the right track. I wonder what she 'll say?"

Our friend was so engrossed in speculation as to Miss Powell's opinion of the matter, that he made but a poor pretence of eating his dinner; and when the little maid came to remove the cloth, and saw the plentiful remains of the repast, she looked at him in wonder, expecting to find him looking pale and ill. Ordinarily Mr. Richard Heath did not leave much to be carried away.

"No, I don't want any more; I 'm not hungry, Cecilia," he said, answering the girl's unspoken question. "After you 've taken the things away, I wish you 'd take my compliments to Miss Powell, and ask her if she would grant me a few minutes' conversation in her room—at her own convenience, of course, but as soon as possible."

"Yessir."

"And there 's half-a-crown for you, Cecilia; you 're a good little girl," said Mr. Heath, looking with a kindly eye on the poor, grimy, depressed-looking maid, whose days were as monotonous all the year round as the fog on a November day. Her melancholy eyes glistened as she clutched the silver, and bobbed him a queer little curtsey. She was accustomed to kind words from Mr. Heath, who had a manly heart, capable of feeling even for the misery of a lodging-house slavey, but, hitherto, his half-crowns had been few and far between. But Cecilia thought none the less of him though his tips were few. He did not rage and storm and bully her till her poor little over-strung nerves became intolerable, and that was worth many half-crowns to poor Cecilia. She cleared the table with alacrity, and in a very few minutes thereafter brought back "Miss Powell's compliments to Mr. Heath, and would he take a cup of tea with her at once?"

In about two seconds Mr. Heath was knocking at Miss Powell's door. She answered "Come in" immediately, and somehow her voice sounded very sweet in the ears of Dick Heath. There was no other feminine voice in the world ever sounded half so kindly he often thought. Mary Powell was just the sort of woman a fellow wanted for a sister or a friend —a thorough brick, with no nonsense about her.

"How awfully cosy you are here!" he said, the moment he opened the door. It was quite a small room, not so well furnished from the landlady's point of view as the sitting room below, but it was bright and cheerful, and even

pretty, seen in the light of the dainty brass lamp with its warm crimson shade. The threadbare carpet had bits of Indian matting here and there, the warm, rich tints giving comfort to the very eye. There were little ornaments and bright things of all sorts on the mantel—poor, shabby, cheap little things, perhaps, but never gaudy, and they relieved the deadly ugliness; while on the walls there were some engravings and etchings in quiet oak frames, and on the piano a bunch of yellow chrysanthemums, the same as Miss Powell wore at the neck of her brown serge dress. And so the chrysanthemums bring us quite naturally to Mary Powell herself. She was tall and straight, well proportioned, too, and with a certain dignity of mien which might have befitted a dame of high degree. She had a dark complexioned face, with features somewhat strongly marked, though the mouth had sweetness as well as strength in its curve. There had not been much in Mary Powell's life hitherto to call forth any latent sweetness in her nature; she had known nothing but poverty and sorrow and grinding care since her very babyhood. She had fine eyes—deep, rich blue, the more striking when contrasted with the swarthy skin and dark hair; but she was no beauty. A ladylike woman who, with the aids of handsome dress and adornments, would have been distinguished; in her shabby attire she was simply ordinary. Richard Heath, however, rather admired her, though from what point of view he would have found it difficult to say. He was not in love with her; he felt towards her almost as a man feels to a dear friend of his own sex to whom he can say anything without being mis-

understood. Such were the happy relations which existed between Mary Powell and Mr. Heath. She was kneeling on the hearthrug when he entered, and, without looking round, she said in that cheerful, placid voice of hers—

"Good evening. I 'm toasting the muffins; they are almost ready. Yes, you can take my pet basket chair if you don't sit down on it too hard. It is not warranted to bear the weight of more than ten stones."

"Then I 'd better eschew it, seeing I 'm eleven and a-half," laughed Richard Heath. "I say, how awfully jolly you are up here! It 's ever so much nicer than my digs."

"Mrs. Partridge doesn't think so; but men can't make any comfort for themselves," said Miss Powell, with her slight, beautiful smile; "that 's why I took pity on you, and asked you to tea. What has happened that you sent so imposing a message by Cecilia?"

"An awful thing has happened, but let 's have tea first. The odour of your muffins makes me hungry, though I left a fair dinner untouched downstairs. Do you know," said Mr. Heath, with a curious look round the cosy room, which rested at last on the woman's face the firelight was glorifying, "I think that for some things it is better to be a woman."

"For some, yes, and for others—a great many more—it is better to be a man," said Miss Powell, with a little touch of bitterness. "For instance, if I had been a man, the probability is I should have boxed Miss Craddock's ears this morning."

"You were late; I heard you go down at ten minutes past nine. Was she mad?"

"Yes; she nearly gave me my leave, although it has only happened once before. But I had to be very meek. A lone woman can't quarrel with her bread and butter," said Miss Powell, and there was a gleam in her eye which looked suspiciously like a tear. "But I must not grumble. I have never been among the unemployed, and I have some comfort in life after all. I am as happy as a queen just now, for instance, when my drudgery is over, and I can have a real good tea in my own room. I can even dispense hospitality," she added, with a quick return of her bright smile, "and to a woman that is a great deal."

"I suppose it is," said Richard Heath, rather absently, as he drank his tea. He was struck, as he had never been struck before, with the unspeakable pathos of Mary Powell's life. It was about as dreary and monotonous in its way as Cecilia's in the mysterious lower regions where Mrs. Partridge wielded her iron sceptre.

"I 'll tell you what, if Miss Craddock knew I entertained a gentleman to tea like this, though it 's only you, whom I 've known so long, she 'd dispense with my services," said Mary Powell, with the old touch of bitterness. "The narrowness of some women's lives and creed is—is to me appalling. Do you know, there are times, Mr. Heath, when I have no religious principles of any kind, when my whole soul revolts against the unequal warping of the web of life."

She touched her teacup with her lips and then set it down, and, folding her hands, looked into the fire.

"I suppose it 's all right, though; it will be,

at least, at the end," said Richard Heath, rather tamely.

"So you always say, and so I believe sometimes; you keep my faith alive," she said, quite simply, and without hesitation. "But what was it you had to tell me? Have you got promotion, or what?"

"I've come into my fortune; my ship's come into port—at least if I can steer her straight," said Richard Heath. "I had a relation on the face of the earth, after all, and he's left me about twenty thousand pounds."

CHAPTER III.

THE MUSIC MISTRESS.

"YOU look quite serious, Mr. Heath. Has the unexpected really happened?"

"Really; though I confess I don't seem to realise it yet. But unless I've been dreaming all day, I've had a will read to me by a firm of respectable lawyers, which informed me that I, Richard Heath, am lawful heir to an estate, subject to certain conditions."

"Tell me about it—every single, solitary thing, and then I'll tell you how glad I am," said Mary Powell, quietly, though her colour had brightened, and her eyes were shining.

"That's just what I've been longing to do all day," responded Mr. Heath, and thereupon laid the facts before his friend. "But the condition—it's so absurd, I can hardly tell it to you," he added in conclusion.

"Oh, do! You mustn't keep anything back," she said, with a smile of amused interest.

"Well, I'm to be kept out of it until I marry, and if I don't take a wife within a year from now I forfeit the whole blessed thing. What do you think of that, now?"

"It sounds a little absurd," Miss Powell admitted, quite seriously, and without any

apparent inclination to laugh; "but there may be something hidden under it."

"But, I say, what am I to do?" queried Richard Heath, bluntly. "I don't know any women but you and Mr. Bentley's sister and—and Mrs. Partridge and Cecilia."

Mary Powell laughed then heartily, and bent over the fire to give it a stir.

"But you have twelve months wherein to improve the time. You must go forth at once, like Cælebs, in search of a wife."

"It may seem very funny to you, but it doesn't strike me in that way," said Mr. Heath, rather savagely. "If it wasn't that such a chance only comes once in a life-time, and very seldom once, I 'd throw it all up. It 's an awful nuisance."

"I only wish," said Miss Powell, with a curious twitch of the lips, "that I had a similar chance. I could make up my mind in much less than a year."

"Could you? I don't believe it. You are just the very woman to be fastidious and conscientious," replied Mr. Heath. "I wish you 'd be civil, and advise me—that is, if you are sufficiently interested to take the trouble."

It did not, apparently, occur to our bachelor that it was rather a delicate subject to discuss with a young lady; if she thought so, she made no sign.

"Well, then, I think you should go away to Quebec as soon as ever you can, and investigate. Wouldn't you like to see the pretty Ursuline, and try and unravel the romance of your uncle's life?"

"Of course, that 's just what I 've been think-

ing about," said Mr. Heath, brightening up. "I'll just do that. You always know what a fellow should do. I've given up my berth at Bentley's."

"You have lost no time, then," said Mary Powell, with a smile. "I don't think you lack decision, after all, and I am not very much afraid of your ship missing the port for want of guiding."

"We'll hope not. Well, if I go I'll write to you often, and let you know everything that turns up, and you'll write to me, won't you? I say, how awfully dull it will be for you."

"Yes, I'll miss you," she admitted quite frankly. "We'll see about the writing afterwards. It may be advisable for you to drop Theobald's Road and all its connections after you leave it."

"Now, that's mean of you, and your eyes condemn your lips," said Richard, hotly. "You promised to be my friend always."

"I have no recollection of it," replied Mary Powell, solemnly. "Anyhow, it is sometimes the best office of friendship to stand in the background."

"I would not have believed you had so much pride, Miss Powell."

"Is that pride?" she asked, with a slight upraising of the eyebrows.

"I believe it is. It will be a shame if you go back on me on account of this beggarly money."

"Don't speak so disrespectfully of it in my presence, if you please," she said, quickly. "I assure you I have a profound respect for money. It has so much in its power."

"Now, I don't believe you mean all that. You are not at all mercenary."

"Then you don't know anything about me," she said, lightly. "Do you know, if the fortune had come to me, I should have a hundred plans for spending it already."

"Let me hear some of them."

"Well, it goes without saying that I should leave Miss Craddock, and I'd take that poor little articled pupil, Lucy Reade, with me; and I'd send some hard-worked fellows I know to the country; and ask Mr. Blaine, the curate, to fill his library at my expense; and I'd certainly give Cecilia a new dress."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'd eat with silver forks every day, and have my lamp shade lined with silk instead of cotton, and indulge in a few similar extravagancies dear to the small mind of a woman. Have you never really made a single solitary plan?"

"No, I'm not original, but I hope if I ever enter into possession I'll be able to make good use of the money," said Richard Heath, with an earnestness which Mary Powell liked to see.

"I hope you will, and I am sure of it," she said, heartily.

"Thank you, you always make a fellow feel pleased with himself," said Richard gratefully. "But you know it'll take me a while to get used to the idea, and may be I'll make a few mistakes at first, but you'll help me out of them, won't you?"

"I? Oh, no! I am not a person to advise. You are going out into the world, and will soon

forget about me," she said, quietly. "Can I give you some more tea?"

"No, thank you. I say, isn't this rather a poor time of the year to go to America—isn't the cold something awful?"

"I believe it is, but bracing and invigorating. *You* need not mind the cold. You'll be in good time to spend Christmas with the French Canadians. You will find it so pleasant, that I prophesy you'll never come back."

"Do you? Then I'll prophesy that I'll spend the next Christmas in London if I'm alive. Will you let me take tea with you here on Christmas Day?"

"If I'm alive; but it's a long time to look forward. Anything might happen. Who knows but then *I* may have a fortune too."

"Then we will meet and rejoice together," he said.

"And your wife will help us. You must have a wife by that time, you know, if you are to rejoice at all."

"So I must. It's a jolly nuisance," said Richard Heath, in his boyish, off-hand way. "Well, I suppose I'd better go down. Wouldn't you take a stroll with me to-night?"

"No, thank you, I have some theory exercises to correct," replied Mary Powell, and then a curious silence fell upon them. Both felt out of sorts, each cross and disappointed with the other, though why, it would have been difficult to say. The two who had been such close friends in the grey days of poverty were like to drift away now, parted by the gleam of gold.

"I'll go out, then, and make some inquiries about the sailings for America. I suppose I'll

have to go by New York. Doesn't the river freeze up, or something, so that steamers can't get up to the St. Lawrence ports?"

"I believe I have heard so," said Mary Powell, and her voice had a weary ring in it, as if she found the subject distasteful to her. Then the blundering Richard proceeded to make matters worse, although he only gave expression to a very genuine feeling.

"I say, how awfully jolly if you had been a man; then we could have gone together."

"Yes; but I'm not, you see," she replied, quite calmly. "How absurd you are!"

She laughed then, her own hearty laugh, which had always seemed to Richard the very pleasantest sound in the world; then they shook hands, and Richard went his way.

When the music-teacher was left alone she did not immediately fix her attention on her theory exercises. Perhaps she forgot all about them. She sat quite still by the fire and watched its yellow flames change to glowing embers, and then grow dim, as the fire went down. What was she thinking? Only that never had life seemed greyer and more dreary to her than at that moment. Her heart did not often fail her; for she was a brave, healthy-minded woman, who knew that the dreary round, the common task, was the lot of the greater part of humanity. She was not given to pitying herself. She knew that in the great city there were many, many thousands to whom her life would seem a very glimpse of Paradise; and yet, while conscious of her mercies, and grateful for them, the heart of the woman cried out for more. For it was an empty purposeless life,

after all, this striving to provide food and clothing and shelter for self alone. She was not without her ideals, this hard-working, insignificant music-mistress, who was apparently of no account to anybody in the world. That was where it hurt. Nobody seemed to want her. The world was no better for her life, it would be made no poorer by her death. So she said to herself in bitterness as she sat by her lonely fire after her fellow-lodger left. She gave no thought to the kind words and kindlier deeds she scattered about her wherever she went. She did not dream that to many her smile and her word of helpful encouragement had been the wine of life. These things cost her nothing, they flowed from her naturally as a pure stream from a pure fountain, and therefore she thought of them as nothing. Mary Powell forgot the Master's words: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water . . . shall in nowise lose his reward."

CHAPTER IV.

BON VOYAGE.

RICHARD HEATH was smoking his morning pipe in the shelter of the funnel of the good ship *Umbria*, in mid-Atlantic, outward bound for New York. It was the morning of the fourth day at sea, and the deck chairs, which had been empty since the Irish coast was left behind, were beginning to fill up again. The worst of it was over. It was a fine mild morning, with a soft southerly wind blowing, and a somewhat watery-looking sun doing his best to struggle through the clouds. The grey sea reflected the grey sky, and Richard, who had been able to stay on deck all the time, was beginning to feel that there was a touch of monotony in that far spreading waste of waters, which seemed as boundless as eternity. Perhaps his eye was not trained to discern the changeful beauty and unrest of these troubled billows; and not having as yet met with any congenial company on board, he found himself very often studying the chart of the vessel's speed, and counting the hours before they should sight land. There were a comparatively small number of saloon passengers, and Richard did not care for the company in the smoking-room; he preferred his pipe in the open—preferred the noise of

wind and waves to some of the conversation indulged in there.

It was the second week in December, and he was on his way to spend Christmas in Quebec. When his pipe went out, he buttoned up his ulster and prepared for his usual stride round the deck. The vessel rolled a good deal, and the deck on the windward side was slippery, but he marched on, enjoying the keen salt air, and the motion, torture to others, was a pleasant excitement to him. As he passed and repassed the long array of deck lounges, each with its muffled occupant, he eyed the faces curiously, interested in the variety, and gave himself up to speculation as to individual histories. The old gentleman with the imperious haughty wife, who required a constant and exacting attendance; the comfortable middle-aged couple, with the happy circle of young faces about them; the newly-married pair, with hands clasped quite perceptibly under the fur rug; the shrewd and far-travelled single lady, who knew the cosy corner and kept it; the roving young tourist, the favourite of fortune, who sported a sable coat, and read French novels all day long; the incipient lovers, who wandered like spirits of unrest to and fro the deck, and were observed after dinner in odd corners, contemplating the moonlight; the quick, sharp, business man, impatiently grudging each hour of forced inactivity; all were absorbingly interesting to Richard Heath. Hitherto he had had no opportunity of studying different phases of humanity save in the streets of London. It is a different thing in the little world of a ship at sea, when for days together you see the same faces, and hear the

same voices, and have the little amiabilities or weaknesses of your fellow-passengers constantly before you. A sea-voyage is surely the happy hunting-ground for the student of human nature.

Richard was marching on, thinking how much Mary Powell would have enjoyed the voyage, and what endless amusement they could have extracted together from those around them, when his attention was arrested by the loveliest face he had ever seen in the world. It belonged to a young girl, coming up the stairs from the saloon, with her arm through that of an elderly man, who it was quite evident was a sufferer from *mal de mer*. He was a tall, spare, gentlemanly-looking man, with a somewhat haughty face, and a keen, searching, dark eye.

His daughter, as Richard imagined her to be, was a lovely creature, tall, slender, patrician-looking, with a sweet, proud mouth, a bewitching eye, and a waving mass of bronze-gold hair which the wind was tossing under her seal cap in lovely disorder. Seeing that the pair had some difficulty in climbing the stairs, Richard sprang forward, and with a touch of his cap offered his arm. "Pray allow me; the motion is disagreeable. Can I get you some chairs?"

"Thank you," said the gentleman, rather languidly. "If you would give me a little assistance I should be glad. This is my first appearance on deck. What an abominable voyage we are having."

"A little swell, that is all." said Richard, cheerily. "You will think it splendid when you are on deck. Now, is not that breeze glorious?"

"It is preferable to the black hole of Calcutta I've been in since we left Queenstown.

Get me a chair, will you, Sylvia. Where 's the deck steward? No, you mustn't leave me, young man. I don't want to measure my length on the deck for the amusement of these confounded fools. Ask the fellow what he has done with our chairs. Ten to one somebody has appropriated them. There 's no conscience on board ship, sir, none."

The young lady smiled comically at Richard, and went off obediently to hunt for the chairs, picking her way quite steadily and without the slightest hesitation among the things. She found the chairs at last, and having got them placed, came back to the gentleman.

"They 're all right, grandpapa; will you come along?"

"I suppose so. See that there 's plenty of rugs. There, there! that 'll do," said the old gentleman irascibly, as Richard placed him carefully in his chair, and wrapped his legs in a fur rug. "You 're the only decent soul I 've met since I left England. What 's your name?"

"Richard Heath, at your service, sir."

"And your occupation?"

"None at present, sir, I am on my way to Canada to see after some real estate I have had willed to me," said Richard, modestly, and yet feeling a certain glow of pride at having such an announcement to make.

"Ah, my name 's Grainger; this is my granddaughter, Sylvia Grainger; and if you 'll take her off my hands till lunch, and walk her up and down until she 's too tired to speak, you 'll oblige. Her chattering tongue is like to be the death of me. Off you go."

Richard reddened at the old man's strange

speech, and looked hesitatingly at the young lady, but she did not seem at all put out, and took the arm he offered quite readily.

"Don't mind grandpapa. It 's his way," she said, with a bewitching smile. "He doesn't mean half he says. I hope you won't desert us because he speaks so queerly."

Richard was conscious of a strange thrill as he listened to these pleading words, uttered in the very softest and most pathetic of voices. He had never felt so happy, and yet so uncomfortable, in his life. He was a shy fellow, in spite of his eight-and-twenty years, and his knowledge of womankind was very slight. The only unmarried woman he knew well was Mary Powell, and she was a very different order of being from this lovely vision at his side.

"It must be rather hard on you, if he speaks often like that," he said, sympathetically, and keeping the slender hand very closely in his arm as a great wave sent the vessel rolling on its side. "I say, I hope you are not afraid. I wish you 'd hold on to that rope with your other hand. If you should be hurt, I would never forgive myself."

"Oh, it wouldn't be your blame, but grandpa's, he sent us off," she answered, archly. "Yes; grandpa is rather hard to bear sometimes; but when one is poor and dependent, one has to cultivate endurance."

Richard instantly felt as if he could have offered half his fortune to the fair damozel, he was so touched by her beauty and her dependent position.

"Are you an orphan, like me?" he asked, kindly.

"No; I have a mother and three sisters, and we were left quite poor. Grandpa was only papa's father, so I believe he thinks we are a burden. All the girls—Flo, Beata, and Emma—have tried living with grandpa, and nobody can put up with him but poor, insignificant, little me. Don't you think it very brave of me to venture to America with him? I am a martyr for the sake of my family."

"Is it a pleasure trip?" Richard ventured to inquire, encouraged by the unrestrained fulness of her confidence. He was rewarded by a peal of silvery laughter.

"Oh! dear no. No sane person would take a pleasure trip to America in December. Grandpa has some property to see after in Maryland; he was born there; and I had to come to look after him."

"I am sure it is very good of you," murmured Richard, feeling very fierce against the ungrateful old gentleman who made such a mean return for so much devotion.

"Now tell me all about yourself," said Miss Grainger, with that pretty show of interest so flattering to a man, especially an impressionable youth like our Richard.

"Oh, there isn't much to tell. I 'm an orphan, and have no friends. I was quite poor, too, till recently, when my uncle died in Quebec, and left me his heir."

"To a large fortune, I hope?"

"Pretty fair."

"Why, you don't seem very much elated over it. I 'm positive that if I had a fortune left to me, I should not have any wits left to enjoy it."

"Well, you see, I can't in the meantime really

feel that it is mine. There 's a condition attached to it," said Richard, rather awkwardly.

"Oh, how horrid! He must have been as crotchety as grandpa. Do tell me it."

But Richard had gone far enough.

"No; I can't. Some day, though, perhaps I may," he said, the latter sentence forced from him by the pout on his fair companion's red lips.

"I hope it is a condition you will be able to fulfil, any way," she said; then, "I say, can you imagine what people get to rave about on a sea voyage? I think it 's fearfully monotonous. Do you know, I 've been on deck nearly all the time, and not a creature has even spoken to me. I felt ever so thankful to-day when you spoke to grandpa."

"I have been on deck, too, all the time, and I never saw you, I 'm positive, till to-day."

"Oh, but I saw you long ago, and I heard you sing, 'Rocked in the cradle of the deep,' in the music saloon the other evening; and it made me cry, I felt so lonely and miserable."

Richard's heart gave a great bound. It was just as well, perhaps, that the next step brought them directly in front of the old gentleman's chair, or who knows what the young man might not have said?

"Hey," said old Mr. Grainger, "go down to my cabin and bring me another shawl, Sylvia. It 's as cold as charity up here. No, let her go. Exercise is good for her."

Richard positively glared at the inhuman old man, and would have taken pleasure in punching his head.

"I 've been watching you," said grandpapa,

with a chuckle, "and as you seem a likely chap, I'll give you warning in time. They're husband-hunters, every one of them, as their mother was before them. I've tried 'em all, and this is the worst of the lot, because she's the prettiest. There's nothing in her but vanity and self-conceit. I'm going to leave 'em my money, though they're mortally afraid I won't do it; but it'll keep 'em out of mischief. So don't you go and make a fool of yourself, or she'll make a fool of you."

Richard was dumb, but the candid old gentleman might have spared his energy for all the impression it made on his listener. Sweet Sylvia had been before him, and it would take something more convincing than the carpings of a bilious old man to change the impression made upon Richard's mind and heart.

CHAPTER V.

AU REVOIR.

THE three remaining days of the voyage passed so quickly that it was a positive disappointment to Richard Heath when he came on deck on Saturday morning and saw the low flat shore of Sandy Hook. Every passenger was up. Richard looked with amazement on the throng; more than half the faces were new to him. There was a pleasant hum of talk, more exciting in certain quarters where the incorrigible betters were laying their wagers on the number of the approaching pilot boat. It was their last chance, for, all going well, the *Umbria* would be in her dock by noon.

"Isn't it splendid to see land again?" asked a certain sweet voice our Richard had learned to love too well.

"I beg your pardon. I was looking for you," he said earnestly, as he took the slim hand in his big honest grip. "You are glad, then, that it is all over?"

"Why, of course," she said, archly, though she averted her eyes a little under his earnest gaze. "But I must say the last few days have been very pleasant. I think perhaps I would not have minded had we not sighted land till the beginning of the week."

"I'm jolly sorry, I can tell you. I never enjoyed anything in the world so much as this trip, thanks to you, Miss Sylvia," said Richard, pointedly. "How is Mr. Grainger this morning?"

"Well enough, but as cross as two sticks. He has got used to the ship, you see, and it bores him to leave it. I don't think men should be allowed to live after they are fifty. They cease to be interesting then and generally become insufferable."

Miss Sylvia spoke with such energy as to suggest to Richard's mind that she had been treated to a larger share than usual of grandpapa's plain speaking.

"Never mind him," he said, consolingly. "Let us go for a stroll round the deck. Look at all these idiots, watching the pilot boat as if it were bringing life to them."

"Perhaps so it is. Many of them will be glad to get on shore though we are not," said Miss Sylvia, as she laid her fingers on Mr. Heath's offered arm. She did not require its support, for the channel was as smooth as a mill pond, with the silvery hush of the morning on its breast. "Well, I suppose we are not likely to meet again," she added, with a little sigh.

"That we shall if I'm alive," said Richard, stoutly, and if there had been fewer people about he might have said more. But the deck of a crowded steamer, within a few hours of landing-time, with all its bustle and happy stir, is not exactly conducive to the success of love-making, especially if the breakfast bell has not rung, and the lady is both hungry and cross.

"Well, I can't see how we are to meet again," she said, a trifle sharply. "I suppose we are going on to Maryland and home again directly after grandpa has settled his business. He is quite fit enough to bring me here, and not offer to take me to see a single sight. He's seen them all, of course. Men are so selfish."

"Not all men, I hope," said Richard, a trifle deprecatingly.

"All old men, then," corrected Miss Sylvia, with a contraction of her fair brows which was perfectly irresistible in the eyes of Richard. She was evidently unhappy, and the bare possibility that the parting from him might have anything to do with it made his heart beat fast and furious.

"I'm glad you've made that reservation," said Richard. "But, look here, Miss Sylvia, why couldn't we arrange to return by the same steamer? My business will not take any longer than your grandfather's."

"Oh, that would be lovely!" she said, with sparkling eyes. "But how will you know?"

"I'll ask Mr. Grainger to let me know—unless, unless *you* would write to me," said Richard, almost trembling at his own temerity.

"Oh, well, I might, if I knew in time; but where should I write to?"

"Address it to the Post-office at Quebec; I can think of nothing else in the meantime. It's awfully good of you, Miss Sylvia; it'll make me look forward to our next voyage, I can tell you."

"Will it?"

Miss Sylvia cast down her pretty eyes, and

the fair cheek so near Richard's coat sleeve had the loveliest flush in the world.

"Yes, of course you know that. If I dared ——" but at that critical moment the deck steward appeared before them, and addressed Miss Grainger.

"Please, ma'am, the old gentleman has gone into the saloon, and is waiting on you very impatient like."

So there was nothing for poor Richard then but to take his lady love downstairs, and resign her to her grandfather.

"She's an early bird, has she caught the worm, eh?" asked the incorrigible, including them both in a grim contortion of his countenance, which was perhaps intended for a smile.

Richard turned from him in disgust, which did not at all disconcert grandpapa, for he merrily chuckled as he ordered Sylvia to prepare an orange for him.

There was no further opportunity for private talk between these young people, as grandpa managed to keep his charge below stairs all the morning, gathering up his belongings. Richard paced restlessly up and down the deck, alternately watching the companion ways and the exquisitely varied panorama the American coast presented to his mind. The morning sun had broken brilliantly through the tender dappled clouds, and the gateway of the New World, in its wondrous beauty, merited the admiration bestowed upon it by those to whom it came with the force of a new revelation. The magnificent river, with its mighty freight of mast and funnel, the ships of all nations on its breast, the two

kingly cities joined by the viaduct which is one of the wonders of the age, and watched over by Liberty enlightening the world, was indeed a sight to engross the eye, to the exclusion of all else.

Although Richard was very much in love, or fancied himself so, he found himself diverted from his expectant outlook for the sweet face of Sylvia Grainger, and his whole being filled with wonder and admiration for the incomparable picture opened out before him. For the first time since he left England he began to feel a lively interest in the land he had come to see, and to think what a glorious privilege it was, after all, to be young and strong, and to have the privilege of such a trip. When Miss Sylvia, having at last freed herself from her grandfather, came on deck, just as the *Umbria* was slowing into her dock, she saw her lover in the distance leaning against the rail, with no thought apparently for anything but the interest of the moment. She did not see him again until he found them out in the bustle of the Customs examination; he found her sitting disconsolately on one of her trunks, waiting for her grandfather to return with an officer to turn out their goods and chattels.

She looked at him with a languid interest, without even vouchsafing him a smile. Miss Grainger was, indeed, grievously disappointed with her lover's behaviour, and showed it. It had been her hope and intention to leave the *Umbria* an engaged woman.

"Isn't this an awful bore?" he asked, sympathetically. "I didn't know we had to stand such a nuisance. Where's Mr. Grainger?"

"Getting a man to open the boxes. Have you any contraband stuff?"

"I? Oh, no; I've only one portmanteau."

"How lovely! We have five trunks and four bundles. Here's grandpa. Don't bother to wait, Mr. Heath, if you want to move on. Don't stay on our account."

Poor Richard was stabbed to the heart by the icy coldness of Miss Grainger's look and tone. He perceived that, in some unaccountable manner, he had given grave offence.

"Of course I shall wait if I can be of any use to you. My time at present is yours," he said, reproachfully, but even that did not pacify her.

"I wish I'd never consented to come to this horrid country," she said, petulantly. "Did you ever see anything so ugly as their old New York they brag about so? Just look at these American women, and listen to their tongues; there is not a lady among them."

"Don't you think so? Some of them are very handsome, anyhow," said Richard, quietly and honestly. "Did you not admire the scene as we came up? I never saw anything to equal it."

"I never saw it at all. I was in gran'pa's black hole all the time doing a valet's work. The next time I travel with gran'pa he shall take a man-servant, or leave me behind. I think you should not wait, Mr. Heath; you are really wasting your time and mine."

Richard bit his lip.

"I beg your pardon. I did not think I was intruding," he said, and lifting his hat he stepped over to his own portmanteau lying above a heap

of overland trunks opposite the letter H. He was hurt, and felt that he did not deserve to be so hardly treated.

He knew so little of feminine caprice, that it never occurred to him that sore disappointment with him was at the root of the young lady's changed mood. He was not detained many minutes by the Custom-house officers, and when he had restrapped his portmanteau he stood with it in his hands, irresolute for a moment, looking at the two fellow-voyagers who interested him more than any of the rest. Poor Sylvia was in the hands of an inexorable female who shook out all her dresses, and opened all her trinket cases in a suspicious and offensive way calculated to rouse that young lady's deepest ire. Richard judged it prudent to keep back just then, but immediately the old gentleman, having got over his ordeal, came over to him, with a grin.

"You're blessed that can hold your all in your hand; see what it is to travel with womankind. Well, I've to wish you a very good day, sir."

"I was waiting," said Richard, encouraged by the kindliness of the old man's manner; "hoping to be of some use to you and Miss Grainger. I am in no hurry. Can I not do anything for you?"

The old man shook his head.

"No; take my advice and get out of the way as fast as possible."

"I was trying to arrange with Miss Grainger to return to England in the same steamer with you. If I give you an address, will you not let me know the date of your sailing?"

"I can't, because I don't know it myself. Take you my advice, and *don't* do it. She 'd manage you in another week. Good-bye."

He was distinctly, even peremptorily, dismissed. There was nothing for it but to shake hands with the old man and turn away. Miss Sylvia saw him go quite well, and when he looked back, in the hope of obtaining a parting recognition, she made him a little distant bow, which sent him away crushed and sad, but more in love than ever. Sweet Sylvia knew what she was doing. She was an accomplished coquette.

CHAPTER VI.

PAUL MEYRICK'S LOVE STORY.

RICHARD HEATH arrived in Montreal one evening a week later, in the midst of a blinding snowstorm. He had remained a day or two in New York, it must be told, in the hope of seeing more of the Graingers, but in that he was disappointed. Then he went on to Niagara; spent a day and night in awe-stricken contemplation of that great and grandly lovely sight; then, promising himself another and a longer visit, he continued his journey to the Eastern Province. The cold was intense. In Toronto our traveller furnished himself with a buffalo robe and a fur cap, which quite transformed him into a colonist. The winter had swooped upon the Dominion suddenly in the midst of the tranquil, lovely Indian summer; the great lakes were shut off from communication with the inland world, because the rivers which made the chain between them were frozen a month before their time; a great snowstorm had whitened all the world, and made the trackless wastes of prairie and bush into fairyland. The breath froze in the open air; in the cities the sleigh bells gave place to the din and roar of wheels; in the country a vast and solemn silence reigned.

Richard felt chilled both in mind and body when he alighted at the cheerless depôt of the big Eastern city, and felt himself more and more a stranger in a strange land. He carried with him, however, a letter of introduction from the London solicitors to Mr. Mark Stephenson, his late uncle's agent in Montreal. So at the station he hired one of the sleigh-drivers to carry him to the solicitor's residence in Sherbrooke Street. He saw nothing as he was carried smoothly through the streets, heard nothing but the jingling of the bells and the shouts of the drivers, confused with the blinding whirl of the snow.

He was not many minutes on the road, and presently the horses stopped, panting and snorting, before a big, comfortable-looking red brick mansion, standing a little back from the street, though with its grounds quite open, neither fence nor gateway to make it private. Richard wondered as he stepped from the sleigh, and immediately arrived at the conclusion that the residence was in an unfinished state.

The ring brought an immediate answer, and when a dainty maid-servant signified that Mr. Stephenson was at home, Richard dismissed the sleigh, and stepped into the warm, brilliantly-lighted hall, mentally resolving that, unless his reception were *very* chilly indeed, he would not seek to roam further that night.

Just as the maid was assisting him off with his snow overcoat, a door in the hall was opened, and an elderly man, with a benevolent, cheerful countenance, stepped out, and looked inquiringly at the stranger.

"Who is this, Martha?" he asked, mildly.

"I am Richard Heath, sir, from London, England, and I carry with me an introduction from Messrs. Wynyard, Glazebrook & Bilton, Lincoln's Inn."

"Richard Heath—Paul Meyrick's nephew, eh? How do you do, sir? We 've been expecting you. Glazebrook wrote us, but why didn't you give us an inkling of your coming? Well, your remissness has awarded you a chilly welcome. Think we 've a poor country, eh, Mr. Heath? Come in, come in."

He shook hands very heartily with the young man. Then the dining-room door opened again, and a little old lady, in a stiff silk gown, a white lace cap, and bobbing grey curls, peeped out.

"Who have you got, Mark, eh?" she asked in a voice like the chirp of a bird.

"Meyrick's nephew and heir from London, Penelope. My sister, Mr. Heath. You are just in time for supper, and we are very glad to see you."

"Yes, indeed, we are," chirped Miss Penelope, just as heartily. And in the warmth of that kindly welcome all Richard's feeling of desolation and homelessness melted away.

In a very short time he was sitting at the lawyer's hospitable table, with Miss Penelope beaming at him from behind the tea urn, her heart warming to him more and more, not only because he had come from the dear land across the sea, but because his face was so honest, his clear eye so winning in its look, while his English tongue had the music of long ago for Miss Penelope in its tone.

They asked him a great many questions about his voyage and the sights he had seen on

the way, but the subject of the will was not broached at all until the two gentlemen were alone in the little smoking-room, where Richard began to enjoy the best pipe he had smoked since he left England. Consequently he felt in a seraphic frame of mind.

"So you didn't expect the windfall at all, Glazebrook tells me," said Mark Stephenson, opening the subject at once.

"No; of course I knew that my mother had a brother once, but we thought he must have died soon after he emigrated. Wasn't it curious of him never to write?"

"Very; but he was a curious man. I knew him intimately for thirty years — an upright, honest, good-hearted Christian, Mr. Heath, or he might have died a millionaire. He had a splendid business, but he dealt with the fur traders so scrupulously, that they always benefited more than he did. You should hear how they speak of him in the Indian settlements up in the North-West. If all white men were like him, our reputation would be brighter among our red brethren."

"Did he trade directly with the Indians, then?" asked Richard with interest.

"A good deal; and they would do anything for him. Of course he had a lot of dealings, too, with the regular fur traders. He had an enormous business. By-the-by, what are you going to do with the thing? I don't suppose you would care to carry it on."

"No; it probably would not prosper with me as it did with my uncle. Besides, you know," added Richard, with a constrained laugh, "it may never be mine."

Mark Stephenson looked keenly at the young man's slightly flushed face, and laughed quietly too.

"There *ought* to be no doubt about it. I hope there is no just cause or impediment why you should not fulfil that condition."

"There is always the possibility that an impediment may arise," said Richard, a trifle awkwardly.

"Well, of course, but it would be a shame to let such an inheritance go for the sake of one woman's 'no,'" said the lawyer, as he watched the blue wreaths of smoke curling up from his churchwarden. "There is no likelihood, then, of your uncle's dream being fulfilled?"

"What dream had he?"

"When he came to me some time ago about his will, he told me a good many things about his past life; some new to me, some I had known for a long time. We were very intimate, and I know he would wish me to tell you some things, especially when you are such an honest, straightforward fellow," said the lawyer, with a blunt flattery. "Your uncle hoped that you would marry Ursuline Chaudière, the young lady mentioned in the will."

"Why?"

The lawyer did not at once reply.

"It is a long story, but I can explain it to you in few enough words. Your uncle hopelessly loved her mother all his life. It is quite a romance. Four-and-twenty years ago Ursuline's mother, Madame Chaudière, was employed as a saleswoman in the fur store of which your uncle was then manager. She was a bright lovely creature, I admit, and as good as gold, but

your uncle was too late in the field. Her heart was given to Pierre Chaudière, her present husband, who was then only a notary's clerk. It was a fearful disappointment to Meyrick. He was a man of strong feelings, but he bore it nobly, and did his very utmost for young Chaudière. To my certain knowledge, but for your uncle he would have been a notary's clerk still. He is so indolent, but handsome and good-natured; beside him, I suppose, a plain, honest fellow, like my friend Meyrick, could have no chance."

"I wish I had known my uncle. He must have been a trump," said Richard, honestly.

"It does me good to hear that old word," said the lawyer, with a smile. "But the second part of the romance is yet to come. The Chaudières had only one child, Ursuline; and she grew up so like her mother that I suppose poor Meyrick, who had never married nor looked at another woman, felt all the old love revive when he saw her grown to womanhood. I believe the second love was stronger than the first. I know he adored her, but again he was too late; and this time the happy rival was a servant in his own employ — a young American, who had travelled for him for some years."

"Poor old chap," said Richard, sympathetically, "that was rather rough on him."

"Ay, it was; and more especially as I knew he was not altogether satisfied with Chauncey— that's the traveller. The last time I saw him before his sudden death, he talked of sending for you; and it was then he told me it would be a great satisfaction to him if you and Ursuline became man and wife."

"But, like him, I 'm out of the running now," said Richard, musingly.

"Yes, unless you could oust the American. I assure you Ursuline is a charming young lady, and they are a delightful family altogether."

"I 've no desire to step into his shoes, though," Richard admitted. "The most satisfactory plan would be for me to make some arrangement with him to take over the business, and let him marry the pretty Ursuline."

"You expect to be married, yourself, then, before the year is out?"

"I think so, I hope so," Richard answered, reddening.

"Ah, well, that 's satisfactory. I told Meyrick it would be a very unlikely thing that a young fellow of eight-and-twenty would be heart-whole. But you 'll go down and see Quebec, and the Chaudières——?"

"Certainly, it is the least I can do to pay my respects to any friends my uncle may have in the place," said Richard, sincerely. "I only wish I had the chance to pay my respects to him."

CHAPTER VII.

SIGHT-SEEING.

AFTER two days spent in the hospitable and pleasant home in Sherbrooke Street, Richard Heath continued his journey to Quebec, accompanied by the lawyer. He did not much admire the scenery in the eastern province of the Dominion; it was bleak, and bare, and hungry-looking, its homesteads poor, and to outward appearance unprosperous. Mr. Stephenson, strong and rigid in his Presbyterian ideas, gave it as his opinion that the poverty of the Quebec settlers was owing to the domination of the Romish Church, which allowed no individual rights to clash with duty to the Church, and which exacted very heavy dues from all its adherents. Richard said nothing, but thought that the land looked so poor and hungry that it would be difficult to make it recoup the cost of working. The power of the Romish Church in the eastern province was a pet grievance of the rigid old Scotchman's, and he thrashed it out during that journey, pouring such a flood of statistics on poor Richard that he grew rather tired of the subject, and several times tried to draw the conversation into other channels. They arrived in the quaint weather-beaten old city quite early in the afternoon, but

darkness had already fallen, though a million stars sparkled gloriously in a hard blue sky, and the brightest moonlight Richard had ever seen cast a halo of indescribable loveliness over Quebec. Winter is very tender to the grey old city, especially when the first snows fall, for then all her filth and ugliness are hidden, and only her exquisitely picturesque and artistic outlines are visible. Richard fell in love with Quebec as they ascended the steep hill from the station walking briskly, the frost being so intense that active motion became imperative. The streets were not well lighted, but the brilliant moon made up for all municipal shortcomings. Mr. Stephenson took a grim pleasure, as they walked, in pointing out to his young friend the noble church of the Basilique and other ecclesiastical buildings, also the curious little statues of the Virgin placed in niches at the street corners—all evidences of the supremacy of Rome.

"You think it's a fine city, my boy? I tell you it's dead, ground under the heel of the Church. Only 50,000 inhabitants, and with such a situation. Why, it ought to be the Eastern gateway of this great continent, and a perfect hive of industry and wealth. There's wealth enough in it, goodness knows, but the priests have it. It's a shame and disgrace, with the Union Jack waving on the citadel yonder. You are smiling at me; but I tell you if you had studied the question as I have studied it, you'd be furious. Why, here we are. This is your poor uncle's warehouse—yours now, my lad; but we'd better go and dine first. This is a good place opposite. I've stayed in it before."

Richard stood still on the uneven pavement

outside the large shop which bore the name Paul Meyrick, furrier. It was the most pretentious warehouse in the street, and the windows displayed a selection of rare and valuable furs, which Richard knew represented a great deal of money.

"I 'm hungry, if you 're not," said the old man, good-naturedly. We 'll have plenty of time after dinner to explore the premises, they don't shut till six. Then after that we can have a sleigh ride across to Point Levis, and pay our respects to the pretty Ursuline. Quebec will make a fine picture from the river on a night like this, and we may as well see it, for ten to one we may open our eyes to-morrow morning on a blinding storm. I don't like that 'broch' round the moon. I don't suppose you know what a 'broch' is; never mind, it 's good Scotch. Come along."

They dined well in the hostelry over the way, and the lawyer waxed more eloquent on his pet grievance. Richard let him rattle on without paying much heed. He felt curiously like a man in a dream; he was meeting with so many entirely novel experiences. Perhaps the one he enjoyed most of all was the spin across the ice-bound St. Lawrence, to the music of the sleigh bells; the swift, glorious motion and the breath of the keen north wind sending the blood coursing wildly through his veins. When they looked back at Quebec, Richard was silent, for the matchless beauty of the picture sank into his soul. The snow, as I said, had made lovely the grimy and dilapidated old houses clustering on the river bank, and above rose the grand heights which Wolfe has made immortal,

crowned by the grey citadel, where waved the British flag. The long, weird curve of the frozen river—black and glittering where it had been smoothed for passage from shore to shore, but broken here and there into great blocks of ice frozen into a thousand fantastic shapes, just as the mysterious hand of the ice-king had gripped it in the dark night watches—all combined to form a strange and fascinating picture, such as the young Englishman would never forget. The lawyer enjoyed his wonder and delight, as an old settler never fails to do, with a certain complacent acceptance of it as a compliment to his own good taste in having adopted so creditable a country.

"We can't compare with the old country in many things, my dear lad," he said, with a smile, "but we have others which lick creation. Can you fancy the Thames, or the Wye, or the Clyde looking like this? No. Well, go on, Jehu; now for Notary Chaudière's. Now, you 'll see the American will be there, though if he had known you were to be in the city he would have been found at his post, I 'll warrant you."

A few minutes' rapid riding brought them to a rambling wooden villa with a verandah running round it, and a sloping lawn which merged into the street without any visible line of demarcation.

"I 've never seen a fence or a garden wall since I landed," said Richard. "Don't they have any?"

"No; the spirit of the democracy insists that the individual shall share what he has with his neighbours. It 's Socialism in the embryo: you 're coming to it at home, only it 'll come

with bloodshed, I doubt," said the lawyer. "Ah, here is my old friend Madame. There 's a picture for you now, my boy."

The hospitable door was thrown wide open, and a comfortable figure, attired in the quaint style of the early French settlers—a flowing skirt, scarcely touching the ankles, and showing a dainty slippered foot which any belle might have envied; a pointed bodice, fitting to every curve of the ample figure; a white kerchief, folded back from the straight white neck, and a snowy cap resting lightly on her dark hair, which made a fit frame for a face beautiful with the perfected loveliness of a happy wife and mother.

"Who comes?" she asked, with her curious, pretty accent. "Ah, Monsieur Stephenson! thrice welcome. Thee we have not seen for so long. Welcome, welcome. Pierre and Ursuline, here comes our honoured guest."

"Two of them, madame," said the lawyer. "I hope I see you well. Time deals gently with my old friend. Can you guess, I wonder, whom I have the honour to present to you this evening?"

Madame shook her head, and looked with interest and approval at the tall figure and honest face of Richard Heath.

"The nephew of our old friend, Monsieur Meyrick; his own sister's son, who is his heir, as you know."

A change passed over the comely face of Madame Chaudière, her bosom heaved, and her clear eye grew dim.

"Thou art welcome, *mon chère*, for thine honoured uncle's sake, God rest his soul!" she

said, and, with a curious, rapid gesture, she laid her plump hands on his shoulders, and kissed him on both cheeks. With this the notary appeared—a spare man, who seemed to have aged before his time. His head, being quite bald, was covered with a black velvet skull-cap, from beneath which straggled a thin fringe of grey hair; his rusty black clothes and general antiquated air made him look as if he had stepped out of some old picture. He had a gentle and courteous manner, which contrasted finely with his wife's more vivacious hospitality, and he had a kind welcome for the unexpected guests. When they were within the house, and the door closed, a bright vision stepped out of the parlour, a miniature Madame, resembling her in every detail of attire, and yet with all the charm of youth and girlish grace to make her yet more pleasant to look upon. Her eyes were as black as sloes; her cheeks like the peach bloom; her lips as red as a rose in June.

"Come, Ursuline, and bid welcome to the nephew of our honoured Monsieur Meyrick," said her mother, motioning to her. "This is my daughter, monsieur, our Ursuline, the joy of her father's life and mine."

Ursuline dropped a grave little curtsy, and advanced with extended hand, while her face flushed with a deeper and lovelier tint.

For a moment our bewildered Richard hoped she was to follow the example of her mother's greeting, but she only gave him the tips of her slender fingers, and then retired with another grave, demure curtsy. Then they adjourned into the supper-room, and at their entrance there rose from beside the stove a short, square-

built young man, with a clean-shaven, firm, honest face, close-cropped hair, and a shrewd, grey eye—a typical American, whom it surprised Richard to see in that simple family circle. Richard wondered at the swift, penetrating, almost entreating look this young man cast upon him, until he heard his name; then he understood what that look meant. It said as plainly as possible, "Are you going to take her from me?" and indicated also a quiet determination to show a good fight. Richard liked the look of him, and when the lawyer introduced him, he shook hands with him very heartily, with a grip which seemed to express a great deal. But for all that, Richard could hardly keep his eyes off Ursuline. It was a sight to see her flitting about the supper table, deftly making ready for the addition to their circle, and to hear her put in a word occasionally, or stop to pat her grey-haired father's hand.

But she kept her eyes demurely away from the young men, as if they possessed no earthly interest for her. Sly puss! all the time she was wondering whether it could be possible that that pleasant faced, big English giant would have it in his heart to come between her and Edmond Chauncey, whom she adored. After due consideration, and listening to the music of his laugh, she thought not. Richard made himself immensely agreeable, and was pointedly courteous to the American, which the lawyer noted, and loved him for his kindness of heart.

"You will honour our poor roof this night, my friends," said Madame, when they had withdrawn from the supper table.

"We have engaged our rooms at the hotel 'St. Louis,'" said the lawyer; but Madame put up her hand quietly.

"Let it go, we have room and to spare. It is not meet that a nephew of our benefactor should not be made welcome to such as we have. Ursuline, give Annette instructions to have the guest-chamber put in readiness, and see yourself that nothing is wanting."

The American did not prolong his stay, and as he rose to go he asked a word with Richard Heath.

Richard accompanied him willingly to the outer hall, and then the two young men looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"I regret that I was absent from business when you called sir," said Chauncey, in his quiet, straightforward way. "I beg to assure you it was not neglect. I have just returned from a long journey into the interior, and I came straight over here. I trust you will come to the warehouse to-morrow, so that I may lay the whole affairs of the establishment before you."

Richard Heath smiled a sunny smile, and laid his big hand on the other's shoulder.

"My dear fellow, I understand. Don't regard me as a bugbear; nor feel yourself obliged to show me any special respect. I'm only a young fellow like yourself, who till now has had a pretty hardish struggle. We'll be friends, I think, and between us will settle up this mixed business, I hope, in the most satisfactory way."

Ursuline came from the other end of the hall: Richard gave his new friend a fervent grip of

good fellowship, and returned to the little salon. He had only spoken a kind word, but he had made two hearts light, and sent the American whistling over the ice-bridge as if he had not a care in the world.

CHAPTER VIII.

WITH THE FRENCH CANADIANS.

NEXT morning Richard crossed the river on foot and paid a visit to the warehouses. The manager was looking for him, and they had a very long and satisfactory talk together in the small business-room in which Paul Meyrick had spent so much of his time.

"But after all," said Richard with a laugh, after they had discussed many things, "we cannot plan much, for unless I fulfil that condition I have even less right to this concern than you."

"I should think, however, that there would not be much danger of the condition remaining unfulfilled," said the American shrewdly.

"Perhaps more than you think," Richard answered. "The very idea that so much depends on it, makes it rather a precarious certainty. If you hadn't been before me," he added with a smile, "I should not have had to go very far now in search of a wife."

"I have cared so long for Miss Chaudière," said Chauncey deprecatingly, but Richard laughed right out at him.

"Why, of course, man. Who's blaming you? If you can wait another year it'll be all right, perhaps: who knows? Mademoiselle may be

the richest heiress in Point Levis. If you were at all mercenary, you would privately pray that I may be unlucky in my wooing."

"I should prefer Miss Chaudière as she is," said the American, with perfect sincerity. "Shall I tell you the modest height to which my ambition soars?—only to the proprietorship of this business. Perhaps next year at this time we may come to terms; that is if you do not wish it for yourself."

"That will not be likely. Well, sir, if by that time the just cause and impediment in the way of my inheritance is removed, you may be very sure our terms will not be hard to arrange. You must not forget that I shall owe some reparation to Mademoiselle, to say nothing of your city hospital, the authorities of which, according to Mr. Stephenson, will feel themselves injured if I fulfil all my uncle's conditions."

"You are very good," said the American, "we hope that before another Christmas we may have the happiness of welcoming you with your wife to Quebec."

"I say, Chauncey, do you think Mademoiselle's parents have any idea of the absurd terms of the will?"

"I don't know. I rather think not; but in any case it would make no difference. They are very unworldly. The old notary is too guileless for this sinful world," said the American with a slight smile, "that is why they are so poor; but I would not have them different. It is refreshing, Mr. Heath, positively refreshing to go over there and escape from the cobwebs and chicanery of commercial life."

"I believe you. The whole establishment is

like a study out of some old book or picture. "They are most anxious that I should spend Christmas with them."

"I hope you will. We keep Christmas gaily here, and have some attractions to offer which you cannot find elsewhere. I hear they are planning a carnival on the ice for Christmas week. There is nothing to hasten you away, I hope?"

"Nothing except that I am losing time, and a wife can't be picked up at any time," said Richard. "Well I must go and take a walk to the citadel. I must say Dufferin Terrace looks a most inviting promenade from below. I don't like the name, though, it is out of keeping with the rest."

"He was our most popular governor, and they showed what honour they could do him even here," said the American absently. "I daresay I can walk with you."

"All right. But, I say, I want the handsomest set of furs you have in the place to send home to England as a Christmas gift. Perhaps I had better look at them now."

The American opened his eyes, and Richard felt annoyed that the colour rose in his own face.

"Don't be a fool," he said in that hot way of his. "There's nothing in *that*. They're only for a poor little music governess who lodged in the same house with me in London. She has the best heart in the world, and likes all sorts of pretty things, though she is rather uninteresting herself."

Rather uninteresting, Richard? For shame. It is not like your loyal heart to speak even

with such slight disparagement. But you will eat humble pie for this yet, Richard, never fear.

The American said no more, but politely conducted Richard to the show-room, where after due deliberation the furs were chosen—furs fit for a duchess, it must be said—duly paid for, and ordered to be dispatched immediately, so as to reach England by Christmas Day. Richard spent the whole day in the city, and returned to Point Levis after dark to find that Mr. Stephenson had left for Montreal, having been called home by cable to attend to important business.

"He left no message for you, monsieur," laughed Madame, merrily, "so you must stay. Christmas will be with us immediately; we will keep it well with you. I think you will stay?"

"I think I will, madame," returned Richard, heartily; "since you are so good as to ask me."

"Good, good, indeed, as if that were much for the nephew of our dear Monsieur Paul. Ah, *mon chère*, he was so good—his heart of gold, his true kindness, his love for us all!"

Madame's eyes overflowed, and she was unable for a moment to go on.

"He was so unselfish, monsieur; he thought only of the good of others. It was a grief to me that our little Ursuline could not reward his goodness, but one cannot force the children's love. Our dear friend had many sorrows, but ever through them all he kept his cheerful good heart, which we so miss. Ah, if you had but known him as we knew him here!"

"I wish I had, madame; I would have been a good son to him, had he permitted me to know of his existence," said Richard, sincerely.

"I shall always regret that I did not know him."

"I marvel that his heart did not more cleave to his native land," said Madame, musingly. "Latterly, when his health failed him, he talked much of England—home, he called it, monsieur; and then he wrote asking about his sister—your dear mother—of whom he had not heard for so long."

"He was your intimate friend, madame," said Richard, with a slight hesitation. "Did he acquaint you with the terms of the will he executed in my favour?"

"In part. He said Ursuline should not suffer. It was in his heart, I know, that you and she might one day love each other. But after, he knew that could not be, on account of our good Edmond Chauncey. Since this morning Monsieur Stephenson has told us the rest. Is it not somewhat hard on Monsieur that he should be so bound?" asked Madame, with an irresistible twinkle of her bright black eye which made Richard laugh.

"It is uncommonly hard, madame. I wish you would help me; and it's a shame, I think, that I am not even allowed the chance of admiring your charming daughter." Richard was certainly improving, and words of honeyed compliment flowed like wine from his lips. He was gaining in experience of life.

"That would have been an honour great indeed, but you see the little one has chosen, and we do not complain," said Madame, gravely. "But let monsieur be happy. There are, I am sure, many lovely English 'demoiselles—monsieur can have no difficulty."

"We shall see. I hope I shall succeed, but you should scarcely wish it, madame, in view of the dowry the non-fulfilment would give to your daughter."

A slight frown contracted Madame's smooth brows, and she shook her head with energy a great many times.

"Fie! fie! What is money? Will it bring happiness to the children? Let them work together, so their love will grow more warm and close. I like not that sentiment from monsieur's lips. It does him no honour."

"It was only from the lips, madame," Richard said, quickly. "Where is Mademoiselle? I have not seen her since morning."

"She has gone to visit a sick woman in the town. Yes, you may meet her. The night is fine. Her father sleeps before supper. He grows old, poor man, and has no energy. Yes, go and meet Ursuline, and bid her inquire on the way about the turkeys for our Christmas dinner."

Richard Heath long remembered these pleasant days spent with the family of the notary in Point Levis. There was a delightful simplicity and goodness in the home which left a lasting impression on the young Englishman's mind, and disabused it of a great many false ideas and prejudices. The Chaudières were devout Catholics, and the absolute consistency of their walk and conversation were to him both a revelation and a warning. They did their duty according to their light—flinching from nothing because it was arduous or disagreeable. Often in the chill mornings Richard in his comfortable bed heard the little family leave the house for

early mass, allowing no question of physical discomfort to interfere with what they deemed a sacred duty, and inwardly asked himself how many Protestants would obey so early a call. As with the outward observance of their faith, so they carried the devout spirit into their daily life. Nothing more beautiful or more touching than the relationship and concord of that family had ever come into Richard Heath's experience. He could not but admire Ursuline more and more every day. But for the gleam of Sylvia Grainger's golden hair and the memory of her bewildering smile, our Richard might have found himself a sharer in his uncle's disappointing experiences in love affairs. Ursuline was perfectly frank and unaffected, and seemed to enjoy the company of the young Englishman. Not only did her piquant beauty rouse his admiration, but the bright unselfishness of her disposition, her helpfulness in the house, her respect for the aged, and her boundless sympathy for the poor and oppressed, made her character as attractive as her face. No wonder Richard found his sojourn pleasant. No wonder the American, in spite of his liking for, and good faith in the young Englishman, was not innocent of sundry fierce and jealous qualms. On Christmas Day, when they were eating the Christmas feast, Richard's summons came in the shape of a tiny sheet of paper, delicately scented, and bearing only these brief words:—

"We sail in the *Servia* on the fourth of January.—SYLVIA GRAINGER."

CHAPTER IX.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE *Servia* was advertised to leave her dock at nine o'clock on the morning of Saturday, the fourth of January. It was three minutes to the time when a cab rattled across the Cunard landing-stage, adding its din to the general *melée* going on, and deposited a single gentleman with his portmanteau at the gangway. The bell to warn those who were on board simply to speed the parting voyagers, had sent out its warning note, steam was up, and the huge heart of the ocean steamship was throbbing tumultuously, as if eager to be gone. Richard was just in time, and as he ran up the gangway he eagerly scanned the sea of faces on the deck, looking for the one which had more interest for him than any other face in the world. But neither Sylvia nor the irate grandfather were to be seen. Richard hurried down to his state-room, tossed his portmanteau into his berth, and returned to the deck with visible impatience in his look and demeanour. What if, after all, they had *not* sailed in the *Servia?* What if he had shortened his pleasant sojourn in Canada, and travelled a thousand miles at breakneck speed, only to enjoy a dreary voyage back to foggy England alone? The very

thought made him pull his moustache savagely, and as he strode grimly up and down he was the object of mild wonder and curiosity among some of his fellow-passengers. They had an early luncheon on board the *Servia* on the first day of sailing, possibly in consideration of the early hour at which most of the passengers must have breakfasted, and at half-past twelve Richard turned into the saloon at the deafening summons of the wretched gong which he and others had often anathematised when outward bound. And there, smiling and unconscious-looking, arrayed in the very trimmest and daintiest of voyaging costumes, sat sweet Sylvia at her grandfather's side. In a moment the sun shone for Richard, and his long legs carried him instantly up to their seats. At sight of him Sylvia did not even blush.

"Oh, Mr. Heath, *what* a surprise! Grandpa, dear, here is Mr. Heath! Did you ever know anything so odd as that we should meet him here?"

Although he admitted the expediency of sometimes cajoling grandpapa, this deliberate fib caused Richard many qualms. He envied Miss Grainger her absolute self-possession, even while it gave him rather a shock that she should think so little of an untruth. But grandpapa was very shrewd.

"No surprise at all, seeing you sent for him," he said, grimly. "You're a fool, young man, to do it; but I wash my hands of you. Here we are again: pea-soup, cold beef, cold chicken, and prunes. Eat 'em up, and enjoy them, if you can. Ugh! thank goodness, in another week I'll be eating my own roast beef at my

own table. Well, what do you think of America? As you have been a full fortnight in it, of course you are perfectly qualified to give a trustworthy and correct estimate of this great continent and its people."

Richard did not wince under the old man's grim sarcasm. It was mellowed by the radiance of Sylvia's smile. After lunch grandpapa went to have his nap; then the lovers—for such they were now—had a blissful time to themselves, which they employed in walking briskly up and down the deck. They had it pretty well to themselves, for the wind was easterly and high, and a drizzling rain had begun to fall. But they did not mind it at all; in fact, Richard inwardly blessed the wind, for it gave him an excuse for sometimes putting his arm about Sylvia's shoulders to keep on her wraps, while she clung to his arm with both hands, prettily excusing herself because the deck was *so* slippery and the wind *so* boisterous. So I suppose they were both in Elysium—at least, for Richard I can positively speak.

"It was awfully good of you to send me that dear little letter," said Richard, daringly. "I hardly hoped you would remember me so kindly."

"Well, I did, though you treated us so cavalierly when we landed," said Sylvia, complacently.

Richard felt a trifle mixed. So far as he could recollect, the cavalier treatment had been all on her side. But he was too supremely happy at that moment to contradict her.

"And have you had a good time?" he asked, tenderly.

"No, a wretched time; just what I said," she answered, pettishly. "Never, never as long as I live will I travel with grandpa again."

"I hope you won't need," said Richard, vaguely. "I've had a good time, rather; they do keep a jolly Christmas down there."

"Down where?"

"At Quebec. I was staying with a family at Point Levis, on the opposite side of the river; old friends of my uncle's. They were very kind to me."

"Were they?" asked Miss Sylvia indifferently.

"Awfully; you never met nicer people. I got my French rubbed up, too. They are French Canadians, and are most sociable and delightful when they talk their own language, although it was the prettiest sound in the world to hear Ursuline's broken English."

"Oh! there was an Ursuline! I wonder you could tear yourself away from her," said Miss Sylvia, sarcastically.

Richard was silent; hurt, indeed, by the positive ill-nature in his companion's tone.

"Tell me about her. Was she pretty?"

"Yes, lovely."

Richard purposely used the strongest adjective he could think of. He was not so completely bewitched but that he could resent rudeness.

"Young?"

"Yes; nineteen."

"Are you going to marry her?"

"No, I don't think so."

"If you only don't think so, you can go away, Mr. Heath," said Miss Sylvia, icily, and

she withdrew her hand instantly from his arm.

"If I was going to marry her, do you suppose I should have paid any attention to your letter?" said Richard, quietly. "She is engaged to another man."

"You might have said so, then. You are just like grandpa; you would die rather than make yourself agreeable. Oh! isn't that a handsome old gentleman standing at the funnel? I am sure he is an earl, or a marquis, he looks so aristocratic."

"I'm sure I don't know, and I don't care," said Richard, crossly. "Why do you torment me so, Sylvia? You are positively cruel."

"Am I?"

She shot a quick little glance at him from her big childlike eyes, which sent Richard's heart throbbing again.

"Look here, I must know what you mean? What was the use of sending for me if you did not want me?"

"Did I send for you? I beg your pardon. You implored me to let you know the date of our sailing. I did so because I foolishly promised. I regret it now."

"Why?"

"Because you are so cross, and horrid, and altogether abominable," said Miss Grainger, politely.

"It's because I don't know what to think. You are not particularly amiable," Richard was forced to say. "Look here, let's have it out. Will you marry me, or will you not?"

Richard looked quite fierce as he said this. Sylvia was silent for a moment, then she folded

her small hands over his arm again, and gave him a look which satisfied him completely.

"Why, of course I will, you stupid boy, if you are very good. No, you must not kiss me, the old gentleman is looking on."

"Bother the old gentleman!" and Richard kissed her then and there, and said a great many foolish things which he lived to regret.

"And now that we are properly engaged," said the young lady in a very business-like way, "you must tell me a great deal about yourself. Did you find your affairs all right down there?"

"Yes, all right. I can enter into possession of the estate whenever I marry, and the sooner you will be my dear little wife the better it will be for me," said Richard, with all a lover's boldness.

"Oh, well, there is no great hurry, is there? About Easter would do. I shall want a great many things, for of course when you are so rich we must have a splendid wedding. Don't you think white surah and yellow silk sashes would be lovely for the girls to wear? They are all dark, you know, not like me a bit."

"I don't know," said Richard, quite vaguely, for in the innocence of his heart he failed to see what girl's frocks had to do with him or Sylvia.

"And we 'll have the service full choral, and I must borrow a little boy somewhere to act as my page," Sylvia rattled on. "Mamma will look elegant in silver grey brocade. Will you give me some real Brussels flounces to drape the front of my gown?"

"My darling, I 'll give you anything you like, only let us understand each other first. Do

you really say you'll marry me as soon as Easter?"

"Oh, of course, if it is too soon——"

But Richard put an effectual stop to that saucy speech.

"Tell me exactly how much money you have. Don't think I'm too mercenary, only I want to know what to expect. Of course I should love you and marry you just the same if you were ever so poor," said Sylvia, giving her imagination the rein. "You have no idea how economical I could be. I've worn a frock turned three times; not many girls could do that."

"I'm glad, my love, I shall be able to give you silks and velvets which won't need any turning," said Richard, fondly.

"But what will your income be? You must have no secrets from me *now*, you know," she said, archly.

"I hardly know yet, darling, but it will be a thousand or two—enough for us to enjoy life on."

"And you'll settle some on me! Though I love you so dearly, Dick, I should feel dreadfully if I had to ask you for every penny I had to spend."

Our Richard had not much experience of women, but there was something in all this which jarred upon him. He thought of the only other two young women he knew well—Mary Powell and sweet Ursuline—how different they were from this saucy, daring, outspoken girl by his side. Perhaps the scheming coquette saw in his face some disapproval of her questioning, for she presently rattled off on another theme.

"Of course, Dick, dear, I was only teasing; I shall trust you with all my heart. Positively there is grandpa! What does the old thing mean by getting up so soon? Will you tell him, Richard, or shall I?"

"I will, of course," said Richard, manfully. "Come and see what he has to say."

The old gentleman was standing at the top of the saloon stairs, frantically waving to his granddaughter to come to his assistance.

"Where are you off to now, you monkey?" he cried, to the great amusement of sundry loungers at the music-room door. "Come here, see, and find my little Gladstone for me. What have you done with it?"

"I'm not coming just now, thank you, grandpa," she answered back, sweetly. "Just lie down for a little longer, and I'll get it for you before dinner."

Grandpapa was utterly speechless, and presented a comical picture, hanging on to the stair rails glaring up at the serene face of his granddaughter.

"Let me look for it, sir," cried Richard, who was always rather sorry for the old man, and felt, in spite of himself, a certain respect for him.

"No, I won't! you can stay where you are, the pair of you; I wash my hands of you; and I wish you joy, you young fool!" roared the irate old gentleman. Then suddenly his expression changed, as his eye fell on the handsome face of the passenger Sylvia had singled out as a marquis or an earl. "Digby Curtis! as I'm alive; what are you doing here? I thought you were dead long ago."

"And I you," said the aristocrat, and with a nimble bound he reached the old man's side and they gripped hands as old friends do after long years of separation.

"So you're alive and going back to the old land at last," said Mr. Grainger, quite broken down with emotion. "Well, well, and not much changed except for the white hair. Ay, ay, England is home all over the world, isn't it, old friend?"

Sylvia, consumed with curiosity, quitted her lover's arm, and made her way to her grandfather's side, thus mutely claiming his notice and introduction.

"Oh, you're there, are you? This is one of poor foolish Raymond's girls. You know he made an imprudent marriage, and never did any good. Make your best curtsy to this gentleman, Sylvia; he's the oldest and best friend I have in the world. You've heard me speak of him—Sir Digby Curtis of Battle-oaks, who has lived in America for so many years."

Sylvia obediently dropped her little curtsy, and offered her hand almost deprecatingly, as if fearing she presumed too much. Sir Digby, with an old-world courtly gallantry, which sat well upon him, raised the sweet white hand to his lips, and looked with real kindliness in the girl's fair face.

"Dear grandpa, won't you come into the music-room with me? Then Sir Digby and you can have a nice long talk," she said, in her most affectionate, solicitous way. Ordinarily grandpa would have quenched her with some fierce sarcasm, but his heart was melted within

him at sight of the friend of his youth. So the three retired into the music-room, and Sylvia never once looked back.

Richard may be forgiven if he felt himself left out it the cold.

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S WAY.

"DICK, dear, I wish you wouldn't say anything to grandpa just yet."

It was the *Servia's* fourth day at sea, and Richard now saw his love for the first time since they left land behind. She had been very sick she said, quite unable to raise her head from her pillow. Honest Dick was rather surprised that she bore so little trace of her sufferings in her appearance.

"Why not, dear?" he asked, gravely. "Is it quite fair to keep him in the dark?"

"Oh, quite fair. He wouldn't mind keeping us in the dark if he wanted to. Besides, he would be certain to make a great noise, and sneer at us for being in such a hurry. It is rather hurried, you know, when one comes to think of it. We really don't know one bit about each other."

"I know enough about you to love you with all my heart," said Richard, quite gravely for him. "I hope you don't regret having given me your promise?"

"Oh, dear, no, you stupid boy; don't go imagining all sorts of horrid things," she said, with a reproving pat on his arm. "Can't you see, dear, that I want to keep our pre-

cious secret a little while to our very own selves?"

"How long?" asked Richard, jealously.

"Only until you come down to Winthorpe."

"How soon is that? Am I to be allowed to travel with you?"

"Oh, no; that would never do. Why, our house is all topsy-turvy, and I have to get the servants back, and everything. No, you must wait till we are all nicely settled, because I want to show you what a good housekeeper I am. Even grandpapa admits that, and, you know, he doesn't burden one with compliments."

"I don't want any proof. I believe you can do everything perfectly," said Richard, with all a lover's unreason, which, however, soon deserts him when reduced to the practical test of blackened sirloins and heavy puddings. "Only you must not keep me waiting very long, Sylvia, or I shall steal a march on you."

"Oh, you mustn't do that, or I shall never forgive you. Then, you know, you must go and see mamma."

"Where does she live?"

"At Paignton; that's near Torquay—a wretched little hole, full of half-pay officers and retired grimalkins."

"Retired what?"

"Old maids. We call them grimalkins. It's a fearful place, full of gossip and evil speaking, and sickening attempts to be fine. Grandpa's is bad, but Paignton—don't ask me to go back to it, or I shall die."

"May I not write to Mrs. Grainger?"

"No, you mayn't, until I give you leave."

"Don't you think you are rather hard on me, Sylvia?"

"Perhaps a little just now, but it's my turn. Don't forget how soon I shall have to obey you. Let me have a little taste of the sweets of power."

Richard could not resist that appeal, especially when it was accompanied by the most tenderly bewitching smile in the world.

"So when we land I am just to go off on my lonely way without even the satisfaction of telling Mr. Grainger that you are my promised wife."

"Oh, but I shall write very often, and we'll get in order as soon as possible, and then you'll come down; and won't we enjoy grandpa's discomfiture when you announce that you have come to carry me off."

"Don't you think he knows already?"

"Not he. So—so many pay me attention," said Sylvia, with a modest drooping of the eyes. "Grandpa often twits me that none of them are in earnest. We will disappoint him this time. Now let's speak about you; what are you going to do when you get back to town?"

"I have nothing in this world to do except try to kill time till you send for me."

"Have you no friends?"

"Only one."

"Tell me about him. Is he a nice fellow?"

"He is not a fellow at all. My friend is a lady."

"Dear me! Do you know you are very bold, Dick, to tell me that quite plainly. Don't you think I might be the least little bit jealous?"

"Oh, no. I hardly think you would stoop to

be jealous of her," said Richard, in a dry tone, which his lady-love did not like.

"Why not; is she old and frizzled?"

"No, quite young; but she is only a music governess, who has to work very hard for her living."

"Dear me; and do you call that sort of person your friend?" said Miss Grainger, with a little expressive shrug. "You must learn to discriminate in such social matters, Dick, dear."

"I hope I shall keep my friend all my life. She is as true as steel," said Dick, quietly.

"Tell me your paragon's name!" cried Miss Grainger, imperiously.

"I don't think I will."

"Then you are horrid, and I believe she is young and scheming, and all that, and you like her better than a friend!" cried Sylvia, hotly, and, breaking away from him, she darted down the companionway and disappeared.

Richard did not follow her, but continued his walk round and round the deck. He was in a singularly dissatisfied frame of mind, and felt rather indignant with his lady-love. He was not a vain nor an exacting man, but he felt that he was not being quite fairly treated.

When he went down to dinner he found that Sylvia had changed her place, and now sat between her grandfather and Sir Digby, who was most attentive to her. She gave Richard a cool little nod, and then praised up the rare wine which Sir Digby had brought from his state-room for his friends. Richard had to take his seat beside old Mr. Grainger, and could not overhear the gay conversation which never flagged between Sylvia and the aristocrat, as he was called on

board. He was really a fine, distinguished-looking man, and one likely to be a universal favourite; but Richard was not disposed to look upon him with a very kindly eye. Grandpapa was not talkative, and Richard did not enjoy his meal. When the waiter brought from Sir Digby's state-room a basket of the very choicest fruit for dessert, Richard rose and abruptly left the table. He lit a cigar, and its fragrant fumes soothed him as he restlessly paced to and fro that weary deck. It was a fine though rather an ominous-looking night; the southerly wind was soft and balmy, but the clouds scudded queerly across the sky, and the moon shone out between with a curious fitful gleam. Hitherto they had had a fair passage, but the peculiar moaning note in the wind and the whirling flocks of sea-fowl seemed to presage a coming storm.

Richard was standing gloomily in a dark corner, puffing at the last remnant of his cigar, when the very lightest hand in the world was laid on his arm.

"Dick, dear, forgive me. I am quite wretched. I did not mean to be so cross."

There was nobody looking, even the friendly moon hid her face just then, so there was nothing to prevent Richard drawing the slight figure close within his great arms; and what could man do in the circumstances but hold her there, and tell her she was at once and utterly forgiven.

"But you mustn't torment me so again, my darling," he said, warningly. "For you see I 'm not good-natured at all, and I can't stand it."

For these few moments sweet Sylvia was

sweetness indeed, and amply atoned for past misdeeds.

"Let us walk up and down. Grandpa and the aristocrat—doesn't the name suit him?—have gone into the smoking-room to play euchre. Shocking of them, isn't it? But it is so good of Sir Digby to try and amuse poor, uninteresting, old grandpa."

"It can be no sacrifice on his part, seeing he is quite as old and as uninteresting himself," said Richard, bluntly.

"Oh, Richard you are quite cross yet, I see. You know quite well there is no comparison between them. Sir Digby is ten or fifteen years younger than grandpa."

"No, he isn't. Mr. Grainger says he is six months older," said Richard, mercilessly.

"If grandpa said that, he either made a mistake or told a fib. Old men have really no conscience about their ages, and they are absurdly jealous of each other," said Sylvia, promptly. "I think Sir Digby is just splendid. You didn't stay to hear the lovely arrangement made at dinner."

"No, what was it?"

"We are to go straight to Battleoaks with Sir Digby. You know it is only ten miles from Winthorpe, where we live, and we are to stay with him until our unpretentious little abode is put in order. Won't it be splendid to live in a real castle, and be waited on by real retainers?"

"I've never had any experience of it," said Richard, in rather a constrained voice, but his companion did not notice it.

"Battleoaks is quite a show place. It was celebrated in the Wars of the Roses, and has

all sorts of fascinating associations connected with it. There are dungeons and moats, and underground passages," said Sylvia, rather vaguely.

"How did Sir Digby happen to have spent all his days away from so grand an inheritance?" asked Richard.

"He has just entered into possession, stupid, through the death of his brother, Sir Fulke —such an eccentric, queer old bachelor. Sir Digby was only a younger son, and, as the family were poor, he had to go and seek his fortune. He has made it, too, I think; and there is another fortune awaiting him, for Sir Fulke was so parsimonious he has saved all the revenues of the estate for years."

"It is a pity Sir Digby is so old," persisted Richard, disagreeably; "he won't live long to enjoy it."

"You are perfectly unjust to Sir Digby, so we won't speak about him," said Sylvia, loftily. "After all, Dick, I don't think you have quite forgiven me. Was I not humble enough? I mean to be good and nice, and when we are married, dear, I'll go and see your friend, and even ask her to pay us a visit, if you would like me to do it."

Again Richard was melted, and the remainder of their talk was not marred by a single disagreeable word on either side. It was the last confidential talk they had on board the *Servia*, for in the night the tempest broke, and for two days raged so fiercely that the hatchways were fastened down and not a passenger allowed on deck. Sylvia remained in her stateroom all the time, and did not even appear when they

stopped at Queenstown harbour four and twenty hours late.

On Monday morning, at four o'clock, they anchored in the Mersey, and, in the feeble grey dawn of a wintry January morning, got on board the wretched tug and steamed up to the landing stage. And almost before Richard knew where he was, he found himself bidden a hasty good-bye, and saw the trio rattle away in a cab without a question asked or a hope expressed that they would meet again.

He was in no amiable mood as he gathered his belongings together and proceeded to the station to get the London train. That was a miserable journey for our Richard. He felt out of sorts with himself and all the world. It was not two months since he had left England, and for what had he hastened back? There was no happy home or glad welcome awaiting him anywhere. He thought of that simple home on the banks of the St. Lawrence where he had been truly welcomed, and where they had made much of him in their genuine, unaffected way. How great and desolate and empty seemed the metropolis of the world after that old-world spot, where true and loving hearts had built a home. There was only one ray of brightness in the sky. It was the thought of the honest look in the eyes of the music-teacher, and of the firm, kindly clasp of her hand. There might have been justification for sweet Sylvia's jealousy that day at least, for it was not of her he dreamed as the train sped him on his way, but of the grave face and tender, womanly voice of uninteresting Mary Powell.

CHAPTER XI.

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

IT rained when Richard landed in London, as it had rained when he left it two months ago. The fog was heavy too, and after the rare wine of the Canadian atmosphere he felt it insufferably depressing and discomforting. He had his plan made: it was to dine at a hotel, change his heavy voyaging garb for the ordinary London attire, and then make his way leisurely to Theobald's Road. He was distincly conscious of a very pleasureable glow of expectation at the thought of arriving just at Miss Powell's tea-time, and of lounging for an hour or two in that delightful cosy room which she had made characteristic of herself. What a relief it would be to pour out all his experiences! He could fancy her pleased interest in his description of the Chaudières, and her delight over Ursuline's love story. Perhaps after they had grown quite confidential over it all he would find the courage to tell her his own love story, and in unburdening his mind, find both satisfaction and peace. She was so clear-headed and quick-perceptioned, so sound and true in her judgments, he could absolutely rely upon her advice in even the most delicate and important affairs of his life. Yes, it was a great comfort to have such a friend, it

made life worth living; and he felt quite sure that, whether he married early or late, he should never forget this old sweet friendship, which had been the brightest thing in his monotonous life in that London lodging. So Richard reasoned as he made ready for his visit, giving, it must be told, but scant thought to the somewhat wayward young woman who was his promised wife. There was a great deal of uncertainty about that sweet bond, whereas there was no uncertainty at all about his friendship for Mary Powell, who could always be relied on, and was above all coquettish weaknesses which were natural to lively young girls like Sylvia Grainger. Altogether Richard promised himself a great deal of solid comfort out of his interview with Mary Powell.

It was about five o'clock when he walked briskly across Holburn into Theobald's Road. As he walked he found it difficult to persuade himself that the past two months were not a dream. It seemed so natural for him to be traversing the familiar slushy road, to hear the great rush and roar of the City, to see the queer sickly gas-lamps flickering through the foggy gloom, and above all to come to a stand at the familiar door. Almost involuntarily his hand sought his trousers' pocket for his latch-key, and just then, looking up, he was chilled to see no light in the music-teacher's window. There always had been a light, showing warmly and cheerily for him when he returned home in the dark evenings. Could she have changed her rooms, received an increase of salary perhaps from the skimp Miss Craddock, and so been able to indulge in the luxury of a change? The

very thought was so disappointing that he gave the paralytic bell a merciless tug, which sent its wheezy echoes all through the house, and brought Cecilia in the very biggest hurry scuttering up the back stair. She was even more grimy and hopeless-looking than ever, and she had a beautiful smudge across her left cheek, which gave her small wizened face an indescribably comical look.

"Don't you know me, Cecilia?"

"Land sakes, 'taint Mister 'Eath, is it?" cried Cecilia, with a welcoming grin.

"Yes, in the flesh, Cecilia. How are you all?"

"So, so; he 'aint a nice gent in the two pair front now. He throws things at me. You 'aint a' comin' back, are you?"

Richard shook his head.

"No, I doubt Mrs. Partridge's two pair front has seen the last of me, Cecilia. Has Miss Powell come in yet?"

"Miss Powell! Oh, lor, she 'aint 'ere; she 's gone away; don't yer know?"

"Gone away! where to?" asked Richard, blankly.

Cecilia shook her head, and Richard saw a tear in her eye.

"I dunno, only she 's away. She left the school not long after you went away, and she was 'ere for a week or two doin' nothing. Then she went away."

"She must have left an address or something with Mrs. Partridge, Cecilia," said Richard, sternly. "She would never leave in that way, it would be too absurd."

"I never heard her say," said Cecilia, meekly.

"Look here, did she seem vexed or unhappy when she went away?" asked Richard, quickly.

"She wor werry quiet, werry, for days afore she went; she never spoke to me when I took up her meals; but she gave me a gownd before she went away, an' a real silver brooch, an' a 'alf sov'ring, an' I never saw a nicer lady, an' I cried myself sick every night for lonesomeness after you an' her went away. There 's an old un in the three pair front now that snaps the 'ead off me, and isn't pleased wi' nothin'," said Cecilia, tearfully.

"Go and tell Mrs. Partridge I want to speak to her," said Richard, with knit brows, and quick hasty speech.

Cecilia nodded, held the door open for him to come in, and left him standing at the table in the dingy little hall. So full were Mrs. Partridge's domain, that she possessed no other reception room for her own guests. She and Cecilia lived and moved and had their being in the mysterious unexplored regions reached by the back stairs. She came up presently, wiping her wet hands on her apron, and gave Mr. Heath a polite good evening. There was even a gleam of pleasure in her worried and haggard face at sight of her old lodger, who had always been so pleased and contented in the two pair front.

"So you 've come back, sir? Am glad to see you, I 'm sure," she said, cordially. "Won't you step into the first floor's parlour, he 'aint due for 'alf-an-hour."

"What 's all this about Miss Powell?" queried Richard, hotly. "Is she really away?"

"She is that," said Mrs. Partridge with a distinct inflection of reproach in her wiry voice.

"You warn't no more than away, when she left the school. I dunno' know what for, but there was a row, and she came home one mornin' about eleven, and said she warn't agoin' back."

"But surely you know where she has gone?"

"No, I don't, worse luck; and there 's a parcel here for her, which came from furrin on Christmas Day, and I had to pay two shillings an' fourpence ha'penny for it, but I took it in because she promised to look back and see me, and it would be safe with me."

"I sent the parcel, Mrs. Partridge, from America," said Richard, quietly. "And has she never even sent you a single line?"

"Not one, which I take it very hard, cos' we were always good friends. I was saying to Cecilia this very mornin' that perhaps she had took ill, an' died of a sudden, an' serve some folks right," added Mrs. Partridge, with sudden passion. "Folks as ud turn their backs on old friends."

Richard was quite unconscious of the sting contained in the landlady's latter sentence. The first part of her speech in its grim suggestiveness, turned his heart sick within him.

"Just keep the parcel in the meantime, Mrs. Partridge," he said, in a sort of dazed way. "I'll go over to Miss Craddock's, and make her tell me what happened. If I hear anything, I 'll let you know. Good evening."

"Good evenin', an' don't take on," said Mrs. Partridge, repenting her former ire. "She 'll turn up all right, may be. If anything had 'appened her, we must ha' heard it somehow, an' so many newspapers about the house."

Richard hurried out of the house, unable to

bear more. These morbid suggestions were too much for him. He dared not entertain them for a moment. He marvelled at his own misery. He felt as he turned down the muddy street, in the falling rain, that his last hope and consolation had fled. In the keeness of that disappointment, and the acuteness of anxiety, he could almost have cursed the money which had taken him away from his friend. After all, if the old life had been monotonous and dreary, it had had its compensations in the freedom from care, the quiet enjoyment of friendly companionship. If their only dissipation had been a concert, at rare intervals, or a day up the river in the summer, their simple pleasures had been shared together, and had laid up a store of happy memories for work-day hours. What had he obtained in exchange for all this? Nothing but a fever of worry, and care, and unrest.

He felt a certain grim satisfaction in arriving with the utmost haste to the respectable establishment of the Misses Craddock, 23 Camforth Street, Holborn. He would wind them up, he told himself savagely, forgetting that he had no business, not even the right of a lover, to question these estimable ladies concerning the dismissal of any member of their staff. But Richard was in that mood that he must fight with somebody, and if with Miss Craddock, so much the better. He had very often been at the outside of the square, solid-looking house, which, by some extraordinary perversion of appropriateness, the ladies had christened "The Cedars." There was not even a stump within the mean little enclosure, nor a green blade even of stunted London grass, or growing

chickweed, in the street from beginning to end. "The Cedars" looked well in advertisements and circulars, and for that justifiable reason was cherished by the ladies as a valuable aid in securing pupils. Richard gave the bell a smart business-like pull, and the door was opened instantly by little Lucy Reade, the articled pupil who was to be one of Miss Powell's beneficiaries when she came into her fortune. She was a poor, stunted, pale little thing, with a frightened, uneasy manner, and a timid shrinking manner—a pretty child, had she been well fed and well cared for, but she lived in bitter bondage at "The Cedars."

"Oh, Mr. Heath," she exclaimed, and instantly burst into tears, and before Richard could say a single word, a majestic figure sailed out of the dim recesses of the large desolate hall, and bidding Lucy begone, came forward to inquire the stranger's business.

"I wish to speak to you, Miss Craddock, if you please," said Richard, quite boldly, and as he was a stranger to Miss Craddock, and looked like a gentleman, she graciously bade him enter. But in a moment her graciousness deserted her, and when Richard, without any preliminary observations, looked straight at her, and asked to be favoured with the circumstances under which Miss Powell had left her employ, she drew herself up, her pale eyes gleamed, and her thin lips disappeared into a scarcely perceptible line.

"May I inquire by what right you presume to ask these questions concerning that person? Are you a relative of hers?" she asked, icily.

"I'm her oldest friend," answered Richard,

quickly. "Unfortunately, I have been compelled to be out of England for about two months, and on my return I can find no trace of Miss Powell. Kindly tell me why she left you. She had no such intention when I left England."

"I dare say not. She might have been here yet, contaminating the innocent minds committed to our care, had we not found her out. I decline to enter into a humiliating account of her deceit and evil doing. The immediate cause of her dismissal was because she interfered in a case of discipline in which the articled pupil was concerned. They were a fit pair, and we don't wonder they were friendly. My sister and I well know that we owe to Miss Powell the spirit of insubordination and wicked ingratitude which that child, the object of our charity, has exhibited for some time."

Richard restrained himself with difficulty. Again his brows were knit, his nostrils dilated, his mouth stern and hard.

"We of course dismissed Miss Powell instantly, and without a character. Fortunately she has had the good sense not to refer to us any person who might seek to employ her. It would be our duty of course to say, that we consider her utterly unfit to have anything to do with youth."

"Not so unfit as you, madam," said Richard, losing his self-control. "I say, that if the truth were told about this wretched place, any parent would rather see a child in the grave than entrusted to your care. Have a care, madam, such things cannot always remain hid and unavenged. Your day will come."

So Richard strode out, leaving the principal

of "The Cedars" transfixed in the middle of her receiving-room. For the first time in her life she had had the truth told her, and it made her quail.

As Richard banged the door behind him and strode away from the house, he heard the soft opening of a window, and looking round quickly he saw the white face of Lucy Reade looking out. In a moment he was as near to the window as the railing would allow him.

"How is dear Miss Powell, and where is she?" asked the girl in quick eagerness.

"I don't know, Lucy, can't you help me? Have you never heard either?"

"No, no, I have never seen her since she went away. It was my fault. She interfered when I was to be punished; but she promised to come back and take me away."

"We will come together, please God, Lucy, and take you away," said Richard, fervently, and just then Lucy disappeared with lightning speed, the window was softly closed, and he was left alone in the rainy street.

CHAPTER XII.

SYLVIA'S CHOICE.

MARY POWELL had disappeared as completely and mysteriously as if she had been spirited away. At the close of a month Richard was still in London, but at the end of his resources so far as a search for his friend was concerned. He left no stone unturned, he even employed the services of a skilled detective, and at the end of the month the result was *nil*. What had become of Mary Powell seemed to be but one more mystery added to the sum of London life. It made Richard Heath a miserable man. He even grew morbid in his brooding over it, and allowed his imagination to run in the direction of horrors of various kinds.

"The likeliest thing I can think of, sir," said the detective in his last interview with his employer, "is that the young lady was taken ill, and died in one of the hospitals. There are so many die every week, every day, for that matter, and are buried without any one knowing about it. There are too many friendless young women in London. Depend upon it, sir, that's the only solution of the mystery."

It was a solution Richard could not accept. His next step was to visit all the hospitals, and

examine the records of their dead for the past two months; an arduous task, but one which he performed faithfully and unflinchingly, and to his own satisfaction. He found that no person answering to Mary Powell's description had died in any of the hospitals during the specified time. Then he allowed himself to hope, and tried to make up his mind to wait with patience for what might be hid in the womb of the future.

During the weeks of his search he had received one letter from Sylvia Grainger, written from Battleoaks, a letter not calculated to satisfy any lover. Richard replied to it briefly, and refrained from making any allusion to the future. All the same he had made a resolve, which was that, directly after he had come to a satisfactory conclusion concerning Mary Powell, he should journey into Somerset, and come to some kind of definite arrangement with Miss Grainger. If she were still in the mind to marry him at Easter, then married they should be, and Richard had made up his mind to stand no nonsense, and to assert his position.

On 26th February, a chill, wintry day in London, Richard took his place in the train which was to bear him into Somerset, where his fate was to be decided one way or another. He felt curiously indifferent about it: the love which had burned so fierce and bright in mid-ocean had evidently cooled in the more sober air of London. Certainly, there had not been much to feed it; even the least exacting of lovers was bound to feel dissatisfied with Miss Grainger's treatment. As Richard sat in the train and looked listlessly through the carriage windows

at the sombre landscapes, he began to count the weeks till Easter, and found that that day six weeks would be Good Friday. Perhaps in six weeks he might be a married man; but the chances were against it. It was quite wonderful with what cheerful fortitude our bachelor calculated the chances against that possibility. But in any case he had the courage to be determined on one point—that there must be no further dallying nor misunderstanding. He must have before he slept that night yea or nay from Sylvia's lips. He was not expected at Winthorpe. He thought it better to come unannounced, as he would be able to judge in the surprise of Sylvia's greeting whether or not he was welcome. He was the only passenger who alighted at the small country station, and in reply to his query for Mr. Grainger's residence, was pointed to a house on the slope of a wooded hill, about half-a-mile distant. The day was closing in, and the twilight was mild and gracious, with a clear, fine air, and a yellowing western sky, which pleased the eye of Richard as he walked up the quiet, picturesque, country road. Sometimes spring seems to throw the skirt of her mantle over these retired country places, before her feet are heard on the highways. Richard heard the twitter of birds in the tall, swaying trees, and even noted sundry green and tender shoots in the hedgerows. It was all very sweet and soothing and gracious after the chill, gloomy airs of the city. As he leisurely ascended the hill to the house, he stopped once or twice, oppressed by his heavy travelling coat in that genial air. In these pauses his eye was rested by the wide and peaceful prospect spread out before him—

such a prospect, with its comfortable homesteads, and fertile breadth of hill and dale, which makes England home. He thought as he looked that he should ask nothing better, if he ever came into his inheritance, than to buy some quiet, country place, where he could live the life of a country squire. Why did Richard sigh as he put his hand on the white gate between the tall old elms which sheltered Mr. Grainger's home? He felt a curious stillness come upon him as he walked up the avenue to the house. There was no sort of excitement about him, although he was within a few yards of the girl he had thought he loved so dearly. He knew quite well that a few minutes more would decide a very momentous question for him, and he was not mistaken.

He asked for Mr. Grainger, and the servant at once ushered him through the quaint, little hall, which, with its Eastern hangings and rugs, its shaded lamps, and feathery palms made a very pretty picture, and opening the door of a cheerful, well-lighted room, announced him by his name. It was the library of the house, and in a snug arm chair by the hearth sat grandpapa, smoking an immense churchwarden, and evidently enjoying himself.

"Hey, who did you say?" he asked, without looking round; but when he heard the shutting of the door he got up and turned round.

"Oh, it's you!" he said, in the utmost surprise; and Richard was quite conscious that there was something more than surprise in the old man's eye. "I'd given up expecting you. Sit down. Throw off that blanket; we're not in the middle of the Atlantic in the dead of

winter, thank goodness! but at the beginning of a respectable English spring. Sit down."

He shook hands with Richard quite cordially, helped him off with his great-coat, and himself pulled in the other arm-chair.

"Ay, ay, you're rather late in the day. What's the good of coming now? Want to have it out with her, eh? To be a sort of pill to counteract the effect of the bridescake, eh?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir," said Richard, quietly. "I wished to see Miss Grainger, though I asked for you. Is she at home?"

"She isn't in the house. She's down at the Rectory drinking tea. They do nothing there but drink tea. When had you anything to eat?"

"I had a good lunch, thank you. How long have you been at home?"

"Six weeks. We stopped a month at Battleoaks—too long for poor Curtis, poor old fool! That I should live to see it."

"What has happened to Sir Digby!" asked Richard, flatly.

"Nothing yet. It's going to happen, though," said grandpapa, grimly. "She managed him in a month, and before midsummer she'll be my Lady. Poor old Curtis! at his age it's pitiful; but it serves him right. What's up? Don't take it to heart. Bless you, she never meant anything but a flirtation with you—and didn't I warn you?"

"You certainly did, sir," said Richard, with a sickly smile. It was quite evident the old gentleman was not aware how far that flirtation had gone.

"You needn't take on, because if she had

married you she'd be the better half, and no mistake. I don't say but that she'd have made a good wife—a better manager, nor a smarter girl never lived. She's worth 'em all for that, but she's bound to be at the head. Poor old Curtis will do as he is bid for ever after, and she'll have that old Battleoaks transmogrified out of all knowledge. She's ambitious, too, and she'll lead the county. Shouldn't wonder if she pushed the old boy into Parliament. It's a perfect comedy to see them, I tell you. Won't you wait? He'll be over to-morrow to dinner."

"No, thank you. I must leave to night," said Richard, in a restrained voice. "And is the marriage to take place soon?"

"In June. It's to be at Paignton, where the rest live. I don't know why not in Winthorpe Parish Church. It would save trouble. But she wants to have a shine down there, and to be even with some of her old acquaintances."

"Do you think that Miss Grainger cares for Sir Digby?" asked Richard, impelled by a strange curiosity to obtain an opinion on the point.

"She cares for his title and his position, and for Battleoaks and the family jewels, and the pictures and the old plate. But he's infatuated with her. Mind I don't say that she won't make a good wife, for I believe she will; but——"

The old man took his pipe from his lips, and, leaning forward, tapped Richard's knee with his forefinger: "It makes me melancholy. She's a pretty young thing, and she ought to have a heart, and to be willing to marry a fine young

fellow like you if he hadn't a penny to his name. That 's what a woman should be, and when she isn't—when she schemes and flirts and sells herself for such things as an old man can offer—it shakes one's faith in womankind. And she has poor Jack's eyes, poor fellow; he had a heart, whatever else he lacked. I 'll tell you, I 'm sorry over the whole thing I am." There was a distinct tremor in the old man's voice, and Richard saw that his eyes were wet. He got up hastily, and took a stride across the room.

"I loved her dearly, Mr. Grainger, and I would have made her a good husband," he said, at length; "but I wish her, with all my heart, happiness and comfort with the one she has preferred to me."

"You 're an honest fellow. I like you, and I always did. I 'm glad that she didn't lead you further on. It wouldn't add to my satisfaction over this melancholy business to know that she had jilted you to write herself 'Lady Curtis of Battleoaks.'"

That speech sealed Richard's lips, though it had been a temptation to him to complain bitterly of her treatment of him.

"Come and sit down, won't you? Stay and dine at least, if you can't stay all night," said the old man, courteously; "Sylvia will be home before dinner, I expect; at least, I know of nothing to the contrary."

"I would rather not stay, thank you."

"Not able to face it out? I would if I were you. I 'd show her I didn't mind, and not let her think you 're heart-broken," said the old gentleman, with a return of his grim humour, which Richard did not at all mind, because he

knew there was a good and a genuine heart beneath.

"I return to town at once. I am rather in trouble just now," said Richard, feeling that need of sympathy which weighs sometimes even on the strongest heart. "I have lost the only friend I have in the world."

"That 's bad. Ay, ay, how soon we begin to count our graves," said the old man with great kindliness, which touched Richard inexpressibly.

"I do not even know that I have a grave to mourn over. There would be a certain comfort in that," said Richard. "My friend has simply disappeared, and I can find no trace of her."

"Oh, it 's a her! Hasn't she married somebody while you were in America?"

"Nothing more unlikely," and in a few words Richard explained to the old gentleman the circumstances of Mary Powell's disappearance. It interested him intensely.

"It 's like a fairy tale; and yet, from your account, your friend is not like a lovely princess, who would tempt anybody to steal her away; and the detective thought she must have died in the hospital. Do you believe that?"

"No; I believe she is in life."

"That 's right, never give up. You 'll find her all right, I prophesy, though it may be in the most unexpected way. I hope, for your sake, it doesn't turn out to be a marriage after all."

Richard smiled slightly, and shook his head.

"And what are you going to do now?"

"Renew the search, and wait with what patience I can," said Richard, rather despondently.

"Don't let your spirits down. I am sure

you'll find her, and I hope she'll reward you for all this anxiety," said the old gentleman in his very kindliest manner. "Well, if you really must go, good-bye. Good luck to you. Perhaps after Sylvia's away you'll give me a few days down here. I have a goodish shooting, and a couple of miles of trout fishing as good as any in Somerset. We wouldn't bore each other. Take a run down any day after the third."

"Is that the marriage day?" asked Richard.

"Yes, in Paignton Parish Church, at twelve o'clock, if you've a mind to see the final extinction of Curtis. Good-bye. I like you. You're an honest fellow. I wish you well."

The old gentleman said all this with great heartiness, and conducted his visitor through the hall to the front door, and there left him with another cordial grasp of the hand. The visit on the whole had done Richard good, and he was conscious of a curious lightness of heart which, under the circumstances, was not at all appropriate. As he laid his hand on the white gate a woman's figure stepped across the lane, and he was face to face with his faithless love. He gravely lifted his hat, and without a word spoken passed on.

"Dick," she called faintly, and even took a quick step after him, and there was keen distress in her face. But he never answered nor looked back; and presently his firm step on the soft road became inaudible. Then Sylvia went into the house, looking as if she had seen a ghost, and left her room no more that night. Next morning she received from Richard Heath a few words of brief farewell, which closed with the expressed hope that her married life would be

without a cloud. If for the first time Sylvia Grainger shrank from the life she had chosen, if her heart went out with unspeakable yearning to the brave young lover she had lost, she made no sign—she had elected to set love aside and walk with ambition through life. With ambition, therefore, it behoved her to appear satisfied.

CHAPTER XIII.

HEARD ON THE PROMENADE.

RICHARD went back to London, rejoicing in his freedom. He even felt ashamed at finding himself so entirely heart-whole. On board the *Servia* he had been very much in love indeed. Now that that episode of his life was over, and Easter was no longer overshadowed by the possibility of matrimony, he had nothing to do but devote himself anew to the search for his lost friend. It was a perfectly hopeless task. Day succeeded day—he haunted the streets of London, scanned every newspaper advertisement, made inquiries in a variety of likely and unlikely places, paid frequent visits to the house in Theobald's Road in the hope that something might have turned up, and at the end of May, as at the end of February, the result was *nil*. Time was rapidly passing; a few months more and Richard must forfeit his inheritance. That occasioned him but little concern. He did not care, he told himself, though he should find himself obliged to sit on a stool again and earn his daily bread. Sylvia Grainger had given him a disgust at womenkind. The thought of deliberately seeking a wife for the sole and only reason that on his marriage depended the possession of his uncle's fortune

was perfectly hateful to him. He was too honest and sincere a young man to make the circumstances in which he was placed an excuse for marrying without any of the elements which go to make a happy union. Often he wished Paul Meyrick had left his money to Ursuline Chaudière, without bothering him about it at all. What had it given him? Often he asked himself that question, bitterly, as he smoked his evening pipe in his lonely rooms. Not much, certainly, and it had taken away out of his life what was more to him than all the world.

He never admitted in his long cogitations with himself that he was in love with Mary Powell, or that, even if he found her, he must necessarily marry her. He did not believe she cared about him in that way, but he knew she had liked him in her true, candid, friendly way, and it was that friendship he missed so intolerably.

It was a long, weary, trying summer for Richard Heath, a summer he spent entirely in London, because he believed that in London alone he should hear of her, if at all.

On the morning of the second of June, dawdling over his breakfast in his comfortable rooms in Cecil Street, Richard suddenly remembered that next day was the auspicious date of Sylvia Grainger's marriage with Sir Digby Curtis. He remembered, too, the old gentleman's cordial invitation to be present, as a spectator, and, he there and then made up his mind to visit Paignton. He had heard much of the beauties of South Devon, and it would pass the time. Besides, he would really like to witness the affair, and to see the white frocks and the yellow

sashes, as well as the Brussels flounces on the bride's gown. He smiled grimly to himself, remembering these minute details. He did not at all anticipate any pangs because another than himself should occupy the groom's important place.

Within an hour he had packed his portmanteau and was off. It was a long journey; the summer evening was merging into twilight when he reached Torquay, where he intended to remain all night. On inquiry, he learned that there were plenty of trains in the morning to run him up to Paignton before noon. After dining at his hotel, he issued forth for a saunter through the town, but the streets were deserted, as a matter of course, the beach and the promenade claiming the bulk of the visitors and pleasure-seekers. Richard felt in a restless mood. He wondered, indeed, whether he was affected after all by the thought of the marriage to take place on the morrow. He did not know what was the matter with him, only he felt more out of sorts than usual. The band was playing the old, old strains of the National Anthem when he reached the promenade, and a number of the loungers were preparing to go home. Richard felt glad of it; he had no wish for a crowd. As he looked on the lovely bay, sleeping in the hushed calm of the sweet summer dusk, and at the long stretch of white sands, he thought he would prefer to spend the night wandering up and down rather than go back to the hotel. He walked quickly through the throng, looking with passing interest at the beautiful young faces and graceful figures of the beauty and fashion of Torquay; and when he

had got without the precincts of the crowd he slackened his pace, and, lighting his pipe, sauntered along easily, enjoying it in a fashion. Richard in his holidays had become an inveterate smoker, and found his pipe a companion he could not possibly dispense with. A few yards before him two gentlemen were sauntering along arm in arm, in close conversation. The one was elderly and the other middle-aged: at the distance Richard thought they looked like professional men. After a little time the distance between them lessened, and Richard could hear the different tones of their voices, though of course he could not distinguish words. Presently, however, they turned, and began to retrace their steps, still talking earnestly, though the elder man seemed to be the listener. They did not heed Richard, though he passed close to them, and he overheard these words:—

"I have made up my mind that if she will take me I shall make her my wife."

"Is it wise, Clement?" the other replied. "You know absolutely nothing about her, a nameless nursery governess—with no character, as Mrs. Baynes was careful to inform you."

"I don't care. She is a lady; and as for Mrs. Baynes, a woman who could treat another as Mrs. Baynes treated Miss Powell is not a fit judge of anything," said the other, hotly. "I—I beg your pardon, sir, you have the advantage of me."

These last words were addressed to Richard, who with one great stride came back and intercepted them in their walk. He was quite pale, and evidently labouring under a strong excitement. The younger man eyed him with the

critical interest a surgeon manifests in a likely patient.

"I beg yours, gentlemen," said Richard, straightforwardly, as he raised his hat. "I have no excuse to offer for my interruption except one which may seem perfectly inexplicable to you. As we passed each other I inadvertently overheard a snatch of your conversation. You spoke a name, sir, in which I am deeply interested, though it may simply be a striking coincidence. Will you pardon me if I ask what you know of the lady of whom you spoke as Miss Powell? I have been for six months looking for a friend of that name."

The gentlemen exchanged glances of surprise, and the elder of the two, a singularly handsome and shrewd-looking person, began to rub his hands together as if in the quiet enjoyment of anticipation.

"Really, sir, I am at a loss to understand what interest you can have in our conversation," said the one to whom Richard had pointedly addressed his remarks; and the tone of his voice was distinctly haughty.

"I suppose I must explain myself before I can expect you to acknowledge my right to question you at all," said Richard, quickly. "A young lady named Miss Mary Powell has been missing from London for about six months, and her friends have been unable to find the slightest clue to her whereabouts, though every means has been tried to discover her. You can answer me in a word, sir, and without giving me any unnecessary information. The missing lady is about five and twenty, tall and dark, and handsome. She has a quiet and reserved manner—

not calculated to win at first, perhaps. She was a governess in a ladies' school in London, and left in rather unpleasant circumstances. Since then the few friends she has have been in great distress regarding her fate."

"Are you one of them?" asked the old gentleman, still rubbing his hands quietly together.

"I am," answered Richard, briefly. "Will you kindly answer my question, sir?" he added to the other, who had never for a moment removed his keen gaze from the curious intruder's face.

"I believe," he said, slowly, at last, and as if he found it difficult to admit his belief; "I believe that the patient who has been in my care at St. Baldred's Hospital may be the lady you seek. There is my card. You can call to-morrow morning and satisfy yourself."

"May I not go to-night, sir?" asked Richard, promptly. "Consider the long suspense. Do not add to it."

"It is impossible," said the surgeon, stiffly. "There is no admission to the hospital after seven. The patients are all in bed now, and asleep, I trust. You can come as early as you like in the morning, and that," he added, as he handed the card, "will admit you at once, though it should not be the visiting hours."

Richard refrained from saying what he thought, that the surgeon was unnecessarily punctilious regarding the rules.

"You will, at least, tell me something about her," he said, eagerly. "How long has she been under your care?"

"Three months. It has been a most serious

case—brain fever, followed by total loss of memory."

"Ah! that explains why she never sent any communication to London," cried Richard. "How did she come to be so far south?"

"She was in the employment of a lady in this town as nursery governess. Owing to some communication from a former employer of Miss Powell's she dismissed her. I suppose it was the brooding over this which brought on her illness."

Richard ground his teeth, and mentally vowed vengeance on the head of the inexorable Craddock.

"But she is now convalescent, I trust?"

"Quite; but her memory has not yet returned," said Dr. Clement, and a curious shadow crossed his face, which Richard in his newborn hope and joy did not notice. "It is possible, however, that the sight of you, a link in the old life, may revive the sleeping faculty. Are you her brother?"

Richard reddened, and that flush destroyed the surgeon's hope.

"No, only an old friend. I am deeply obliged to you, sir," said Richard, gratefully, "and to Heaven," he added reverently, "for I believe that a special providence guided me to this spot to-night."

"It is certainly curious that we should have met under such circumstances," said the surgeon, courteously. "Good evening. I trust the morning will bring you no disappointment."

He raised his hat, took his companion's arm, and they walked away at a pace which indicated to Richard that he wished the interview to end.

"Odd, isn't it," said the elder man, when they had gone some distance in silence.

"Rather," replied the surgeon, briefly.

"Rough on you, Clement," said the other, with a sympathetic touch of his arm.

"Rather," said the surgeon, briefly as before.

"Sweetheart, of course," put in the old gentleman, cheerfully. "Well-spoken young man."

"Quite forget what I said a while ago, Rodney. I've changed my mind about Miss Powell. I promise myself some interest now in the development of her case. Shouldn't wonder if it's a cure."

"Matrimony, eh?"

Dr. Clement nodded, and the subject dropped. But the iron-willed and self-contained surgeon of St. Baldred's had sustained the bitterest disappointment of his life.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT LOVE CAN DO.

BETWEEN nine and ten o'clock next morning Richard Heath presented himself at the gates of St. Baldred's Hospital, and on presentation of Doctor Clement's card was at once admitted. The doctor was at breakfast, but finished it hastily, and came down to the reception room at once.

"Good-morning," he said, courteously, and with greater cordiality than he had exhibited on the previous evening, a night's thought having reconciled him to the inevitable. "I have seen Miss Powell this morning, and told her of our extraordinary meeting last night."

"And what did she say?" asked Richard, eagerly.

"She made no comment. I am bound to tell you the truth. Miss Powell appears to have no recollection of your name, and while she listened courteously to my story, I saw quite well that she was privately wondering why I should have related it to her at all."

Richard looked troubled.

"Is there no hope of an ultimate cure, then?"

"Oh yes," replied the doctor at once. "The probability is that the power of memory will be

restored in an instant by some unforeseen flash."

"And in the meantime can she stay here?"

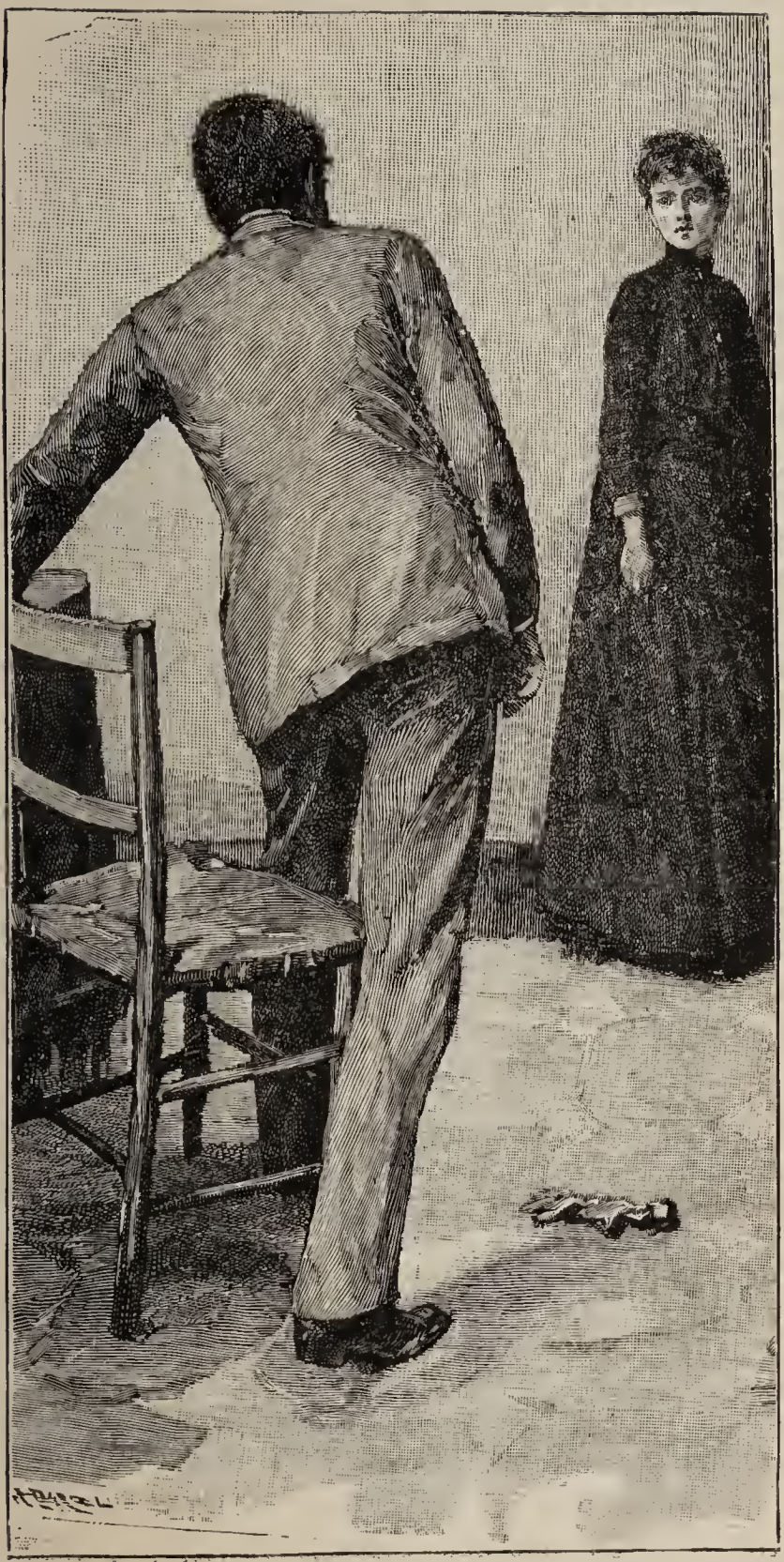
The doctor shook his head. "I fear not. An hospital, as you are aware, is a place for persons who suffer from serious and pressing bodily ailment. In justice to others, such patients as Miss Powell must go to be treated in their own homes."

"But she has no home," said Richard, passionately.

The doctor elevated his eyebrows. There was great significance in that slight action.

"You wish to see Miss Powell, I suppose?" he said, with his hand on the bell-rope. "She will come to this room, and I shall withdraw. Perhaps you will see me before you go."

He gave his order to the nurse who answered the summons, and followed her out of the room. Then Richard was left for some minutes alone. He remembered these minutes all his life as a period of acute mental strain. At length he heard a light footfall in the corridor, the door was unhesitatingly opened, and Mary Powell stood before him. He was surprised that there was so little change in her. She looked round with a kind of vague questioning, and then her eyes fixed themselves, with a strange, penetrating glance, on the face of the man before her. Richard stood quite still, though he felt his heart tumultuously beating. He hardly knew what he expected or feared from that searching gaze. Slowly the slight colour receded from her thin cheeks, a puzzled, bewildered look came into her eyes, then, quite suddenly,



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a red flush overspread her face, and she extended both her hands.

"Why, Richard, how glad I am to see you. Is it Christmas Day?"

Richard was sore put to it to restrain himself from clasping her to his heart. He knew in a moment the full meaning of the intolerable misery of the past few months, and realised that this was the woman Heaven had given him for his wife. He even wondered that he had been so utterly and stupidly blind. He took her slender hands in his firm, strong grasp, and looked down into her sweet, conscious face.

"No, it is not Christmas Day, although it is a happier day than any Christmas I have ever spent," he said, with a great gentleness. "You know me. Do you remember what place this is?"

She shook her head.

"I remember nothing except being overcome with that fearful dizziness and pain, and that cruel woman. Oh, Mr. Heath, if you knew how Miss Craddock has pursued me!"

"She shall suffer for it, if there is justice in the land," said Richard, sternly. "This is the hospital, dear, and you have been in it for three months. I have come to take you away."

"You? I do not understand. Oh, yes! you have come home from America. I remember it all, the fortune and the funny will," she said, with the exquisite dawning of a smile, which was like the shining of the sun to Richard's heart. "But why should you take me away? I have nowhere to go. I shall go back to Mrs. Partridge and Cecilia until I get something to do."

"You will, at least, trust yourself to me until you get back to London?" said Richard, quickly.

"Oh, yes, I shall travel with you. We shall have so much to speak about. Did you find the girl with the pretty French name? But, perhaps, she is here with you. Did you marry her?"

"I marry her! There is only one woman in the world I want to marry," said Richard, unable to hold his peace.

"And will she not?" she asked, with a ripple of amusement. "Not even to save the fortune for you?"

"Will she?" asked Richard, daringly, and again he grasped the white, frail hands, and bent his passionate gaze on the sweet, earnest face of the woman he really loved, and had loved all the time, only his eyes had been sealed. Slowly a perception of his meaning dawned on Mary Powell, and again the red dyed her cheek.

"It is pity, Richard," she said, almost piteously; and tried to draw herself away; but he held her fast.

"No, no, my darling; it is love! I have been the most miserable man on the face of the earth since I returned to England. I have done nothing but seek for you. I even bearded the lion-like Craddock in her den, and gave her something hot. For all that I deserve some reward."

"If I were quite sure," she said, with a strange wistfulness which touched him inexpressibly. Again he called himself a fool, and sundry harder names, for his unutterable blindness.

"You may be, my darling; for as I stand here I love only you. I have a great deal to tell you—to confess to you. I am not worthy of you at all, Mary; but if you will give me a chance I will be some day, with your help."

"Well, I *did* feel very glad to see you. I think I never remember feeling quite so glad before," she said, with a sweet, direct simplicity. "Perhaps it *is* love. Yes, I believe it is. But think how rich you are. I am nobody. I am even without a character on the face of the earth."

We will not record Richard's answer. It was not verbal, but it expressed quite a decided opinion on the objections made by Mary Powell. They felt quite surprised when they were interrupted by a knock at the door. When Doctor Clement entered, Miss Powell turned about and glided out of the room. But not before the Doctor had seen her face; and its expression gave him as great a surprise as he had ever received in his life.

"Well?" he said, inquiringly, and unable to repress a slight smile at the quite patent triumph on Richard's face.

"She's all right. Not remember me, indeed!" said Richard, loftily. "We were almost life-long friends."

"And likely to remain so," said the doctor, significantly.

"I trust and expect so," answered Richard, fervently. "Will you tell me honestly—Is Miss Powell strong enough to be married and to undertake a trip to America?"

"Immediately, if you like," responded the doctor, instantly. "I know of nothing likelier

to restore her completely to health than a sea voyage, in company she likes."

It cost the surgeon something to say this. But he was a thorough man all round, and did nothing by halves. He did not grudge the honest fellow before him his happiness, and was genuinely glad at the satisfactory issue of a case which had caused him some anxiety.

"Then I may take her away at once?"

"You may."

"Thank you, sir. May I offer my sincere thanks for the kind care Miss Powell has received from you in this place. Is there any way in which we could be allowed to give a substantial thank-offering in token of our gratitude?"

"An institution such as this, Mr. Heath, is capable of swallowing up a great many thank-offerings," was the surgeon's answer, which gave great satisfaction to Richard. The thank-offering, when it came a few months later, was a great surprise to Doctor Clement, who had not imagined Richard Heath to be a man of means.

A few days later Mrs. Partridge received the old tenant of the three-pair front to the imposing shelter of her drawing-room floor. And she had her instructions from another old lodger that Miss Powell was to receive the very best attention it was possible for her to give. But there was no fear of Miss Powell lacking any needful, or even superfluous attention so long as the grateful and joyful Cecilia had the power to run up and down stairs.

On the ninth of June there was the most unpretentious wedding in the world in a certain small church in Holborn, but I question if in

St. Peter's or St. George's a happier pair ever stood up before the altar. A week later Mr. and Mrs. Richard Heath sailed for Quebec in the good ship *Salamis*, and if the voyage of life only turned out only half so happily as that voyage, we need have no cause for anxiety concerning them.

The whole story of Sylvia Grainger was told to Richard's wife before the wedding-day; but, with that magnanimity characteristic of a generous woman who loves, she laughed at it all, and told him he need not abase himself to tell her any more harrowing tales, as she was not of a jealous or suspicious temperament. Such treatment only made Richard feel more ashamed of himself, and more grateful to the dear woman who had given herself to him; and it was the profoundest satisfaction of his life to lavish upon her everything love could suggest and money could buy. So it was a very stylish and handsome lady whom Richard introduced, with such pride, to the kind Chaudières, whose hearts, needless to say, were won by the radiance of her first smile. Happiness had made a lovely woman out of Mary Powell. They stayed to be the honoured guests at the happy marriage of Ursuline, whose husband Richard had made joyful and grateful by a deed of gift, which presented him with the business he coveted and the whole stock free of cost; then the happy pair took a long tour through the vast continent, and only returned to England in time for Christmas. And they took tea together, according to promise, in the sitting-room of the three-pair front in Theobald's Road on the afternoon of Christmas day.

I cannot tell you here of the good which Richard Heath and his wife do with the money Paul Meyrick left to them. Suffice to say that Richard's dream of being a country squire is realised ; also that his wife has every opportunity of fulfilling all her old dreams. Lucy Reade is not the only grateful heart which blesses her beloved name. Cecilia, buxom and comely to look upon, is the wife of the coachman on Mr. Heath's estate, and keeps the lodge. Even the wiry Mrs. Partridge is not forgotten.

The old gentleman from Winthorpe is a frequent visitor to that happy household : it is the only place in which he feels himself at home. My Lady Curtis of Battleoaks is too great a personage to entertain nobodies.

Many a laugh Richard and his wife have over the melancholy days when he was a "Bachelor in Search of a Wife."

ROGER MARCHAM'S WARD.



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ROGER MARCHAM'S WARD.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

"WHAT on earth shall we do with her?"

"Do with whom, Uncle Roger?"

"This girl, Dorothy Vance, my old friend Geoffrey Vance's daughter Dorothy. She is on her way here, and will arrive soon; in fact she should be in London to night or to-morrow."

"Oh, Jerusalem!" was the intelligent comment of the younger of the two gentlemen, and he grinned as he carefully cut the top from his third egg, and poured out another cup of coffee for himself.

He was a good-looking young fellow, of the foppish type, with close-cropped hair, carefully-pointed moustache, high-pointed collar, and immaculate boots. Fred Wellesley had a very high opinion of himself. The other occupant of the room, Roger Marcham, Squire of Underwood, presented a fine contrast to his insignificant-looking nephew. He was a man in his full prime, and carried a splendid figure and noble head set on a pair of broad, manly shoulders.

His dark hair was slightly tinged with grey, as was the short, pointed beard so becoming to his face. His deep, dark eye was kind and keen and true; looking into it you felt at once that Roger Marcham was a man to be trusted—ay, to the uttermost limit that human trust can go. He seemed perplexed by the letter he had just received, and the contents of which he had communicated to his nephew in an exclamation of surprise.

"But what's she coming here for?" queried Fred Wellesley, with his mouth full. "Underwood isn't quite the place for young lady visitors, is it?"

"No, but she is not coming here as a visitor, but as a permanent resident. Miss Vance will make her home at Underwood," said Roger Marcham, not without a certain reserve of manner.

"Phew! Mystery on mystery! Why should she make her home here? Has she any claim on you?"

"Yes, her father and I were brothers in every thing but name," returned Roger Marcham, briefly. "I promised when I was in India eight years ago, that, in case of anything happening to him, I would take care of his only child. He has died suddenly, it seems, and of course my promise requires fulfilment."

"Very good of you, I'm sure, Uncle Roger; you're charitable to every one but yours truly," drawled Fred Wellesley. "But if this little Indian is up to anything, she'll enliven Underwood for a fellow. It's dull enough as it is."

"You are too fond of it as it is, Fred. I only wish it saw less of you and the office more,"

said the elder man, candidly. "You have no business to be idling your time here just now."

"Oh, hang it! Couldn't stay in town after the 12th. Only barbarians do it," said Fred, languidly. "Let a fellow alone, and he 'll go up and work no end after a fortnight's shooting. Any common clerk has that now-a-days."

"You have too many holidays, Fred, and I 'm going to take sharper measures with you, my lad," said his uncle, quietly. "But to return to Miss Vance. You must go up to London and meet her, Fred. I have two meetings to-day, from which I cannot absent myself. Can I trust you to do this without making a fool of yourself?"

"Oh, come now, draw it mild," said Fred, with an assumption of offended dignity. "Remember a fellow 's a gentleman, at any rate."

Roger Marcham laughed.

"One thing I must ask of you, Fred, not to speak so much slang before Miss Vance. It is offensive to me, and I do not wish my ward's ears to be offended in the like manner. There are plenty of words in the English language without coining them for yourself."

"I 'm not going to make a prig of myself, even though Miss Vance's ears should be offended," retorted the young man with a touch of sulkiness. "If she doesn't like the way I speak, she needn't listen."

"I shall require you to obey me, my lad, while you are at Underwood," said Roger Marcham, quietly, but firmly; "and I shall expect you to remember my hint. Well, will you go up and meet Miss Vance?"

"If I 'm to obey you, I suppose I must," said

Fred, kicking the table leg more like a sulky school-boy than a man of three-and-twenty. "Where is she coming from, and how shall I know her?"

"She is a passenger in the *Indus*, and is due to-day. You must ask for Miss Vance, and if she is not too tired, come down to Norton by the first train. Send a telegram, if not, so that Kennard may have the carriage at the station."

"Very well; and am I to shut up all the time, because I can't promise that I won't talk slang? But perhaps Miss Vance may be a jolly girl, who rather likes things off-hand, and talks slang herself."

"I scarcely think it; and I sincerely hope not," returned Roger Marcham. "Well, I must go now. If you make haste, you will catch the 10.55. I should not like the poor girl to arrive in London and find no one meeting her. She will be downhearted and lonely enough as it is."

"I hope she isn't one of the weeping willows," said Fred, shrugging his shoulders; "because I can't condole, you know. I believe in taking things easily. A short life and a merry one, is my creed."

"Some day soon I think you will awaken to the reality of life, my boy," said Roger Marcham, a trifle sadly. "I wish something would rouse you. I am often anxious about you. There is only a step between idleness and sin, if indeed idleness is not a sin."

"Oh, draw it mild," said Fred, taking his legs from between the table, and rising indolently to his feet. "Don't make a fellow out a weed until he *is* one. I don't drink, or bet, or do anything very bad."

"You haven't even sufficient energy to do anything with all your might. I think if you had been left to your own resources, you would have made a man of yourself long ago."

"Well, it isn't very nice to throw what you have done for a fellow into a fellow's face," said the young man, complainingly. "And I'm sure I work jolly hard in that wretched old office for my beggarly pittance. I'm no better treated than any other clerk. Not one of the fellows I know would take it so easily."

If Mr. Fred Wellesley's pittance was so beggarly, where did the diamond horseshoe in his breastpin and the flashing brilliants on his little finger come from? To look at Mr. Wellesley, one would not have thought he supported himself on a beggarly pittance. His uncle's attire presented a curious contrast to his; but it was not difficult to determine which was the more perfect gentleman.

"There is no use arguing this vexed question, Fred. It is one on which you and I need never hope to agree, until you gather common sense. But don't forget that I have left you at perfect liberty to leave our establishment, if you think you can better yourself elsewhere."

"Now, that's mean. After bringing up a fellow like a gentleman, to tell a fellow he can go and mix with cads," said the aggrieved Fred. "I'm your only relation in the world, and you should do something handsome for me. What are you going to do with all your money if you don't give me a share?"

Roger Marcham's colour rose slightly. Perhaps the young man presumed a little. He was his only sister's son, but even that tie would not

excuse such a speech. He made no reply, but turned quickly on his heel and left the room. Sometimes Roger Marcham's nephew was a sore trial to him. He had no patience with the indolence and lack of manly independence displayed by Fred Wellesley. These qualities had no part in Roger Marcham's character, else he had never attained to such an honoured and responsible position. With his own energy and untiring industry he had built up the business house of Marcham, Marcham & Co., until it was a magnificent concern, yielding an immense return. But though now a very rich man, Roger Marcham had not abated a jot of his early industry. If he did not now sit on a stool in his own counting-house, the entire concern was still under his own supervision. Then he had numerous other duties devolving upon him as the master of a considerable estate in the country. He had undertaken various responsibilities in connection with County affairs, which he faithfully fulfilled, and it was his endeavour to make himself acquainted with the circumstances and requirements of all the people on his lands. It could not be said, therefore, that Roger Marcham led an idle life. But he loved to be in the midst of work; it was the wine of life to him. Many wondered why one so honoured and esteemed, so well fitted in every way to build up a happy home, which would be a centre of sweet influences, should live so solitary a life. If there was any past romance, any page of his young history which might have accounted for it, it was not known. Roger Marcham was kind, courteous, chivalrous towards all women, but paid particular attention to none. He had evidently



not yet met the woman he could ask to share his heart and home. This being so, Fred Wellesley, the child of Roger Marcham's only sister, who had made an imprudent marriage with a worthless man, was regarded as his uncle's sole heir. Perhaps this knowledge or assumption was at the root of the youth's idle habits and calm presuming on his relative's kind nature, but Roger Marcham preferred to believe that Fred had inherited weaknesses to struggle against. Sometimes the lad's failings lay heavy on his heart, and he was utterly perplexed as to what course he should pursue with him.

As the Squire of Underwood cantered into Norton that fine autumn morning, however, his thoughts were not occupied with his nephew. Memory was busy in his heart, recalling old scenes, old faces, old experiences, which sent a warm thrill through his whole being. He had loved Geoffrey Vance with a brother's love. Together they had sat on one bench at school and college; together they had entered on life's battle, and were fighting with equal success when Geoffrey Vance's health failed, and he was obliged to sail, with his wife and child, to the shores of that distant land which had given him and his darling a grave. Roger Marcham's heart was filled with sympathy and sorrow for the young girl, orphaned in a foreign land, coming over the sea to seek a home with unknown and untried friends. He had never seen the child. When making a business visit to Calcutta, Geoffrey Vance had travelled hundreds of miles from his inland home to meet with the friend of his youth. He was a broken-down man then, with the shadow of an early death on his heart, and

Roger Marcham had gladly given the promise to take care of his friend's child as soon, and so long, as she required his care.

Now that she was so near that a few hours would bring her to Underwood, Roger Marcham felt a trifle anxious and perplexed. It had come upon him so suddenly that he could make no arrangements; she must just take them as they were, and depend, for a time at least, on the motherly kindness of the old housekeeper, who was as much part of Underwood as its master; and then, counting up the years, Roger Marcham was amazed and a trifle dismayed to find that Dorothy Vance must be twenty-one. So it was a young lady, and not a child, he had to welcome home—a grave responsibility for a man who knew nothing about women, their ways, and needs.

"There 's no use worrying over it," he said to himself, trying to fling off the apprehension he felt stealing over him. "Child or woman, I must do the best I can for her, for her father's sake."

So he resolved, not dreaming how very soon he would account it the highest privilege in the world to do the best for her, for her own sweet sake.

CHAPTER II.

DOROTHY VANCE.

ROGER MARCHAM attended a meeting of Guardians in Norton, lunched at the Norton Arms, and rode on to be present at a County meeting in Midgate. It was a protracted affair, and the afternoon was well spent before it terminated. It would take him all his time to be home for the six o'clock dinner.

He had given the County affairs only a divided attention, his mind being occupied with thoughts of the stranger coming to his home. He was conscious of a curious feeling of excitement as he rode through his own gates that fine evening. As he watched the shafts of sunlight piercing the leafy boughs of the beeches which were the pride of Underwood, he wondered whether Dorothy Vance would admire them.

"Do you know if the carriage went to the station, Mrs. Curtis?" he asked the lodge-keeper.

"Yes, sir, to meet the half-past four train. It has just gone back about ten minutes ago."

"With Mr. Fred and a young lady?"

"Yes, sir," the woman answered, and he saw that her curiosity was aroused.

"We are to have a new experience at Under-

wood, Mrs. Curtis. The young lady is my ward, just returned from India. She will make her home here, at least for a time," said the Squire. "We must all try and make her as happy as we can. She has had a great deal of sorrow, and has just lost the best father any girl ever had."

"Indeed, sir. *Poor dear.* She's as sweet-lookin' a cretur' as ever I saw, sir, an' a real lady as ever I saw, sir, by the way she holds her head. It'll make a bit o' a change in the Hall, sir."

"Ay, it will," returned the Squire; and with a nod and a smile rode on. It was twenty minutes to six when he handed the reins to the groom at the door, and hurried into the house.

On the stairs he met Fred, in immaculate evening dress, whereat his uncle stared in amazement.

"Hulloa, what's this for?"

"For Miss Vance, of course. It's all very well to sit down to one's feed in blue serge when there's only fellows, but when there's a lady in the house it's different. She's a stunner, Uncle Roger."

Roger Marcham smiled.

"You must have had very little time to spare in London?"

"Only an hour and a half. I was just in time for the *Indus*, so I took Miss Vance to the Continental for a bit of lunch, and then we came on."

"You did well. Where is she now?"

"Oh, upstairs; old Maple waiting on her hand and foot. Shouldn't wonder, Uncle Roger, if the fair Indian usurps your place here. She looks as if she'd been accustomed to homage

all her days—by Jove! she does. She was rather stand-offish with yours truly at first, but she seemed to find out after a bit that I wasn't a half bad fellow. We are tip-top friends now."

"That's right, Fred," laughed Roger Marcham as he ran upstairs, hugely amused by the young fellow's conceit.

In an incredibly short time Roger Marcham had dressed, and was descending to the drawing-room, when the opening of a door near him caused him to look round. When he saw a girlish figure coming along the corridor he retraced his steps, and they met just at the painted window on the landing."

"Dorothy Vance, my friend's child. You are welcome to Underwood," he said, and took the slim, pale hands in his firm, warm grasp, and, bending forward, touched the low, broad forehead with his lips.

"My guardian, Uncle Roger, papa said I was to call you," she said, with a strange wistfulness. Her large grey eyes dwelt for a moment searchingly on his face, and Roger Marcham stood in silence, feeling that she was only seeking to know in that first long look how it was to be between them. Her colour rose a little, he felt her hands tremble, and a sweet smile touched her proud, womanly mouth. "I think I have come home," was all she said, but the words were the sweetest in the world to Roger Marcham's heart.

"Sit down here just for a moment, my dear," he said, drawing her to the low window seat. "Before we go down just let me tell you how glad I am to think I can fulfil my promise to your father. Geoffrey Vance's daughter and

Geoffrey Vance's chum can never be like strangers to each other."

"Oh no, I am so glad you are like what you are," she said, with a swift, ingenuous smile. "I got such a fright on the quay to-day, fearing your nephew was yourself."

Roger Marcham laughed, and that laugh was a pleasant sound to hear. Then a little silence fell upon them, for Roger Marcham's thoughts bore a curious mingling of regret over the past, and much up-springing of hopes for the future. He could scarcely believe that this tall, slight, self-possessed young lady, with the grave, sweet, womanly face, crowned by its glossy brown hair, could verily be the child of his old friend. It seemed but yesterday since they were boys together, building castles in the air, and planning for themselves a glorious future of achievement and endeavour. And what were the thoughts of Dorothy Vance? She had come over the sea in obedience to her father's last request, leaving behind the only friends she had ever known, to trust herself with the unknown comrade her father had loved so well. She had formed many ideas of what Roger Marcham would be like, but when her eyes fell upon that noble face, with its grave charm of expression, and kindly, honest eye, every apprehension fled, and a strange feeling of rest and trust stole into her heart. She felt, indeed, as she expressed it, that she had come home.

"Shall we go down, now?" said Roger Marcham, offering his arm. "Dinner will be served now, and Fred impatient. I hope he did his duty. It was a great disappointment to me that I could not meet you myself. But the

letter only came to-day, and I could not put off my engagements."

"Certainly not. Mr. Wellesley was most kind and attentive. I am afraid I shall be a great trouble to you, Mr. Marcham."

"In what way?"

"Oh, girls are always troublesome. Papa told me I was to do all I could to make you happy, and I will."

"Thank you. If you feel happy and at home at Underwood, Dorothy, I shall be happy," said Roger Marcham, sincerely. "You will find a great deal needing your attention, I am afraid. We are very Bohemian in our habits."

"Does Mr. Wellesley live here always?"

"He ought not. He is supposed to have work to do in the office," returned Roger Marcham, and said no more, as they had reached the dining-room door.

Fred Wellesley was in his element that night. Roger Marcham was amused by his evident desire to carry the heart of the stranger by storm. Roger himself said very little, and left the young people to carry on the conversation, which they did without a break. He was pleased to see that Fred seemed anxious to be as gentlemanly as possible, and that he refrained from the use of slang, which was a great concession. Miss Vance seemed to be an accomplished talker, and she was quick at repartee. When once a sweet, clear trill of laughter sounded through the sombre old room, Roger Marcham almost started at the unusual sound.

"Won't you come out for a stroll, Miss Vance?" said Fred, eagerly, the moment dinner

was over. "Uncle Roger always has letters to write, and we 'll just be in the way."

Roger Marcham bit his lip, but turned to his ward with a smile.

"Yes, if you are not too tired, go with Fred through the park. Can I get a wrap for you?"

"Won't you come too?" she asked, with a slight hesitation, which he misunderstood.

"Oh, no, an old fogey like me might be in the way," he said, with a laugh. "When Fred goes back to town you will have plenty of time to weary of me."

So Fred had his way, and they left the house together, Roger Marcham watching them from the window with a slight cloud upon his brow. Well, perhaps it was but natural and right that he should be set aside. He was old and grey and grave, and could have nothing in common with those just standing on life's threshold. He was only "Uncle Roger," and of what use in the world is an uncle but to provide the means for the young people to spend, and stand aside while they enjoy it. And yet he felt impatient of his nephew's appropriation of Dorothy Vance; on this first night, at least, he might have kept in the background; he might have thought that guardian and ward would have something to say to each other, if only to speak about those who were gone. No such consideration, however, had presented itself to the mind of Mr. Fred Wellesley. He was seized with a sudden and boundless admiration for Miss Vance, and, in accordance with his usual selfishness, claimed her society without giving his uncle a thought. It had been understood that a fortnight was to be the limit of the young man's autumn holidays,

but the fortnight came and went, and another began to draw to a close, without any sign that Fred was wearying to get back to work. At length Roger Marcham deemed it his duty to speak.

He found him idly smoking a cigar on the terrace one afternoon, and walking up to him, said, candidly—

"You must turn up at the office on Monday morning, Fred. I have waited this time to see how far you would transgress the bounds of what is reasonable and right."

He spoke quietly, but he was gravely displeased. Fred, however, only replied by a flippant laugh.

"All right, gov. I'll go up on Monday, but I was going to say I think I'll run down always on Friday nights, and stay till Monday all winter."

"There are two to agree on that question, Fred," returned his uncle, quietly. "If you do so, you must pay for your short time, if only as an example to the rest."

"Oh, come, that would be too mean on a fellow, I declare. You're getting worse every day. Uncle Roger, what's the use of being so hard on a fellow?"

"Hard, my lad; I am not hard enough."

"I don't know what you call hard, then? Haven't I seen you scowling at me for a week back, but I was bound I wouldn't give in. I'm not to be treated as if I were a common cad. You promised long ago, you know, to make me like your own son. You can't go back on it now."

"I promised to put you in a fair way of earn-

'ing your own livelihood. If you imagine by that that I intended to hand over the entire fruits of my life's labour to a man who had never learned the value of an honestly-earned shilling, you were under a mistake, Fred, and the sooner you know it the better."

"Oh, hang it! draw it mild. What are you driving at. Do you want me to quit?"

"I 'll tell you what I want, and what I will have, Fred, or you and I must part. You must go back to business, and apply yourself to learn its principles, of which you are curiously ignorant even yet. You must make yourself of some use in the place, or it cannot hold you. Your example is pernicious in its effects on the others, and, unless it is amended, must be removed."

Fred Wellesley threw away the end of his cigar in a passion.

"It 's only since Miss Vance came y u 've grown so mighty anxious about me," he said, bitterly.

"I see you doing your utmost to win the affections of my ward, Fred," said Roger Marcham, with quiet dignity, "and, as she is in my care, I must see to it that the man who seeks to win her is worthy of her. You are not so. Until you make a man of yourself, Fred, I fear I must banish you from Underwood—I must speak plainly. It is my duty to myself, to you, and to her."

"Then I 'd better get out to-night," said Fred, bitterly, and a scowl darkened his brow. "I must say it 's a pretty way to treat a fellow, and I won't forget it."

So saying, Mr. Fred Wellesley made haste into the house, got up to his dressing-room,

gathered his things together, and prepared to make off to the station. He was rather pleased on the whole to be able to pose as a hero and a martyr. He hoped for an opportunity to show himself in his new *role* to Miss Vance, and he was not disappointed. As he left the house he met her on the terrace, with a wrap round her head, and her hands full of autumn leaves.

"Oh, Mr. Wellesley, where are you going?" she asked, glancing in amazement at his portmanteau.

"London. The gov.'s kicked me out. He says I can't live on charity any longer. A pretty thing to have thrown in a fellow's teeth, eh?"

"I don't believe he said such a thing. If I were your gov., as you call him, I'd have sent you off long ago," was the unexpected and candid rejoinder. "I never met any one so lazy and idle as you. Have you any aim in life?"

"Yes, I have now, and, by Jove, I'll win it, too," said Fred Wellesley, with astonishing energy. "Neither you nor the gov. need flatter yourselves you've got rid of me, because you haven't."

So saying, Mr. Fred stalked away, and Dorothy Vance went into the house with a smile of amusement on her lips. It changed to one of grave tenderness, however, as she paused for a moment in the pillared doorway, and looked out on the peace and beauty of the autumn night. What tender thought had touched her heart, and brought a sudden dimness to her eyes? She turned about presently, and, crossing the hall, opened the library door and looked in. Roger Marcham was sitting at a table with papers and

writing materials before him, his face wearing an anxious and troubled look. Dorothy Vance entered and gently closed the door.

"May I come in for a moment, Mr. Marcham? I shall not disturb you long."

"Surely, come in, come in!"

She advanced to the table and laid her many-coloured leaves upon it. He wondered why her hands trembled, and the sweet colour flitted so restlessly in her cheek.

"Fred has gone away, I believe," he said, with a half smile. "It will be very dull at Underwood for you now."

"Why now?" she asked, nervously fingering the leaves, and keeping her sweet eyes downcast.

"Because you have no one to enliven the place for you."

"*You* are not going away?" she said, lifting her eyes suddenly to his face.

"No."

She nodded gravely, and then walking over to the window stood for a moment looking out into the gathering darkness. Roger Marcham looked at the graceful outline of her figure showing against the window, and wondered why his heart should be filled with such strange unrest. Dorothy Vance had not brought peace from over the sea, and yet her presence had brought an unwonted sunshine into Underwood. Roger Marcham knew already that it would be empty without her.

"I have been thinking, Dorothy," he said, in his grave, quiet manner, "that perhaps it isn't quite a good thing for a young girl like you to be so much alone, to have no companionship

but mine. If you like, I shall set about getting a lady companion to reside here."

"I do not need a companion, Mr. Marcham. I have Rosamond Tracy when I am dull," she answered, in a low voice, and without turning her head. The next moment she came forward to the table, and, leaning her slim hand on it, looked at him with an exquisite blending of shyness and wistful tenderness.

"I know I am a great trouble to you," she said. "But I shall try not to be in your way. I need no companion. I am happy in having so beautiful a home, so kind a guardian. Will you let things go on as they have been since I came, and I shall try not to be in your way?"

The colour rose in Roger Marcham's cheek. How she had misunderstood him! He restrained himself by a mighty effort. He did not know what possessed him, but he felt towards this sweet girl as he never felt towards any woman. Could it be that thus late in life love had come to him, to make havoc of his peace of mind?

"Very well, my dear," he said, in tones which his great effort made cold and calm. "We shall just let things go on in the meantime. You are not in my way, and I am glad you feel yourself at home in Underwood."

CHAPTER III.

RIVALS.

"BUT mamma, it is impossible we can ask Mr. Marcham without Dorothy Vance," said Rosamond Tracy. "It would look most extraordinary."

"Why? We used to ask Mr. Marcham before his ward appeared. Why not now?" asked Mrs. Tracy, sharply. "I don't like Dorothy Vance, Rosamond, and I'm not going to pretend I do."

"Why don't you like her, my dear?" asked the Vicar, a mild, gentle-hearted man, much under the control of his clever, ambitious wife. "I am sure she is a very sweet girl."

"Oh, I am sick of hearing her called a sweet girl," retorted Mrs. Tracy. "Were I a strong young woman like her I would rather toil night and day than live on Roger Marcham's charity."

Mrs. Tracy was not a lady, as her manner and speech and expression indicated. The Vicar looked nervous and put out.

"My dear, you should not speak like that. Miss Vance is not altogether dependent on Mr. Marcham," he said, quickly. "I hope you have never said anything of the kind outside. Mr. Marcham only told me that Mr. Vance had left very little. He also said that his ward did not

know. He gave me these items in confidence, and I ought not to have betrayed it."

"I am not likely to speak of it outside," was all the satisfaction his wife deigned to give. Then she turned once more to her daughter, who was busy writing invitations at the davenport—"Do you really think, then, that we must include Dorothy Vance?"

"Yes, I do."

"Most certainly," put in the Vicar, and considerably relieved, he left the room.

"It was the most unfortunate thing in the world that Dorothy Vance should have come here just when she did," said Mrs. Tracy, rather complainingly. "I am quite sure that Mr. Marcham was just on the point of speaking last autumn. He was never out of the house."

"It was papa he came to see," said Rosamond, quietly.

"Oh, nonsense! He admired you very much. He told me so, often."

"He might admire me. I daresay he did," said Rosamond, a trifle absently, and her eyes wandered over the sunny landscape to the green woods surrounding Roger Marcham's home. But she was not thinking of him. Rosamond Tracy was a handsome girl, and one possessed of a strong will and determination. It was her mother's ambition to make a splendid match for her; and she had fixed on Roger Marcham as the most desirable. But on this point Rosamond and she did not agree.

"No doubt Dorothy Vance thinks it would be a very fine thing to be mistress of Underwood," said Mrs. Tracy, rather vindictively.

"I am quite sure, mother, that Dorothy has

never thought of such a thing. I never saw a girl of her years less worldly wise," said Rosamond. She was not particularly amiable nor charitable as a rule in her judgment of others, but in this instance she was just to Dorothy Vance.

"You are infatuated with the girl. I think her deep and scheming," said Mrs. Tracy. "If she wins your best chance away from you, what will you say?"

"If you mean Roger Marcham, mamma, she is welcome to him," she replied, calmly. "Well, how am I to word the invitation to Underwood? Is Fred Wellesley to be included?"

"We must send him an invitation, of course, but you had better address it to the office," said Mrs. Tracy, readily. "If he comes, Miss Vance will be disposed of for the whole afternoon. I hear he is quite infatuated with her."

Rosamond's brow darkened, her lip trembled, and a bitter look crossed her face as she took the pen in her hand. Unconsciously her mother had given her a cruel sting. Strange as it may seem, Rosamond Tracy had given her strong heart into Fred Wellesley's keeping. What had been a summer's idle pastime to him had been earnest for her. She was capable of a deep, passionate affection, and she had given it to Roger Marcham's nephew, a man who had never given a serious thought to anything in his life. Never until he met Dorothy Vance.

"These three will make twenty, mamma," she said, quietly. "That is quite enough. Our tennis ground is not too big, and there is no use crowding the grounds."

"No, no, that is quite enough. I do not give

many parties, but I flatter myself that they are always enjoyable and select—my garden parties especially so," said Mrs. Tracy, with a self-complacency which made her daughter smile.

The invitations were all accepted, for, to do Mrs. Tracy justice, her entertainments were always enjoyable and well-appointed. The party from Underwood were a little late, having waited for Fred to come down by the noon train. He had applied himself to business so well of late that Roger Marcham was much pleased. It made him rejoice that he had at last awakened to his responsibility, and yet sometimes a little dissatisfaction mingled with and marred the elder man's gladness, for the cause was very apparent. Dorothy Vance's influence had wrought the change, and there was no doubt in Roger Marcham's mind as to the issue. There were times when he wished his ward had remained in that far country. She had made Underwood too bright a place with her gracious presence. What would it be without it now?

Opinion in Norton was divided as to Roger Marcham's ward. She was not popular in the ordinary sense of the word; her reticent, shy manner was taken for pride, she could not make herself frank and pleasant to all, and she had a natural shrinking from strangers; but those who had seen most of her were astonished to find that she began to creep into their hearts. She was perfectly unaffected, and, when occasion offered, fearless in her upholding of the right and condemnation of the wrong—too much so for the conventional ideas of certain folk in Norton, but Roger Marcham would not have had her different in one particular for worlds. He loved

to see her eye grow moist, her smile, sweet and tender, when a generous deed was done or spoken of; he admired the kindling flash, the heightened colour with which she spoke of what was mean and ignoble; she had exalted ideas of life, her ideal was high and pure and true. Little did Roger Marcham dream that he was her ideal of all that was best in manhood. Like all fine natures, he had a humble opinion of his own merits; often he was weighed down by the thought that his society was irksome to her, that the tie between guardian and ward was one she would gladly break. He thought it would cost her no effort to leave Underwood, that she would gladly share his nephew's lot in life. But these thoughts made no difference in his manner towards her. It was like that of a father—grave, kind, considerate, solicitous for her comfort in little things as well as great. They were very happy together in their quiet way, and yet there was a kind of restraint between them; a misunderstanding on one essential point.

Those who did not like Miss Vance refused to admit that she was to be admired for her personal appearance, and yet it was impossible not to be struck by the winning charm of her girlish beauty as she entered the grounds that afternoon by her guardian's side. More than one thought involuntarily that they looked a handsome, well-matched pair.

"How do you do, Mr. Marcham? *So* glad to see you," said Mrs. Tracy, coming fussily across the lawn to meet them. "Ah, Mr. Wellesley, delighted to see you also; so good of you to come all the way from London to adorn this



humble gathering. Ah, Miss Vance, how do you do?"

The difference in her greeting to Dorothy Vance annoyed Roger Marcham beyond measure. Dorothy herself was quite unconscious of it. She did not like the Vicar's wife, and seeing Rosamond approaching, she left her guardian's side and went on to meet her. The two girls were good friends, and without being aware of it, Dorothy had read Miss Tracy many a lesson. One thing, however, Rosamond would find it difficult to forgive her, and that was winning Fred Wellesley's allegiance away from her. And yet there was no trace of any such feeling visible in expression or manner, and she welcomed her rival with a smile and a kiss, though she had seen Fred Wellesley's open admiration for his uncle's ward visible in his manner as they crossed the lawn together.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Wellesley," she said, gaily, giving him her hand with the utmost indifference. "You truant, you have quite deserted Underwood. Is he not becoming a model business man, Dorothy?"

"Yes, and we are very proud and glad," smiled Dorothy. "Don't you think it is a change for the better?"

These words were to Fred Wellesley sufficient reward for the self-denial of the last few months. It was some plainly-uttered words which fell inadvertently from Dorothy Vance's lips which had shown him that to please her he must turn over a new leaf; naturally it was a satisfaction to him to be told, and thus publicly, that his efforts were not unappreciated.

"I suppose a fellow must do something some

time," he said rather tamely, but the look he bent on Dorothy made Rosamond Tracy's heart beat angrily. "Well, Miss Tracy, and how has the world been using you?"

"As well as could be expected," she retorted, a trifle sharply. "Dorothy, there is papa looking for you. You are a great favourite with him."

Dorothy turned, and went up the path a little to meet the Vicar, and Fred Wellesley and Rosamond were left a moment alone.

"I haven't seen you looking so charming for a long time, Rosamond," he said, the old temptation to flatter a pretty woman coming uppermost. "Upon my honour, you do look stunning!"

Rosamond Tracy's colour rose, and she bit her lip.

"Don't trouble to talk such rubbish to me," she said, haughtily.

"Oh, come now. We used to be such friends. You haven't thrown me over, have you, Rosamond?" he said, impressively.

Dorothy was out of sight, and for a moment his old admiration for Rosamond Tracy returned.

"Thrown you over?" she repeated, slowly, and lifted her passionate eyes to his face.

"You are mad with me, Rosamond," he said, in that indolent way which to any high-spirited woman would have been most offensive. "Let's have a stroll by-and-by and talk it over. Could you come now?"

"No. I must go and see if they are going to play," she said. "If the sets can be made up without me, I shall stay out."

So saying she walked away, and Fred turned to look for Dorothy. But the Vicar had claimed her, and carried her off to his favourite rockeries, where he was exhibiting some of his latest treasures in the shape of rock plants.

Much to Fred's disappointment, he found no opportunity for a quiet talk with Dorothy. She seemed to have come out of her shell wonderfully, and was quite a centre of attraction at the cluster of garden chairs under the acacia tree. Rosamond's attention was taken up at the tea-table, and the liveliest part of the proceedings was nearly over before she was at liberty. While the guests were all busy with tea or ices, strolling about under the shadow of the trees, and making merry over the rival successes of the games, Rosamond, under the pretence of returning to the house, slipped through the shrubbery into the little park where the Vicarage ponies were enjoying the sunshine. She was leaning over the gate, caressing the petted pair, when she heard a footstep behind her. She did not look round, but her colour rose and her eyes betrayed the exultation in her heart.

"I thought you 'd be here," said Fred Wellesley's voice. "Will you let a fellow finish his cigar here, Rosamond?"

"If you like," she answered, indifferently.

He sat up on the gate and looked down at the handsome figure in its perfectly fitting tennis dress, at the finely-featured face, shaded by the broad sun-hat. The hand resting on the pony's glossy neck was white and exquisitely shaped. Altogether Rosamond Tracy was a beautiful woman.

"Had a good time this afternoon, Rosamond?"

"A good time? Oh, well enough. Garden parties are always stupid things," she answered, slowly.

He saw that she was out of sorts.

"Your uncle's ward has come out wonderfully this afternoon," she said presently, and not without a touch of bitterness. "She is quite the star of the afternoon. How deeply smitten Mr. Marcham is. Won't you find it rather difficult to accustom yourself to 'Aunt Dorothy'?"

"Oh, come now, don't be so absurd," said Fred, quickly. "That's all nonsense. Why, Uncle Roger is old enough to be her father."

"That's nothing, and it *will* be, you will see," she said, significantly. "Everyone is speaking of it, and really it will be a very good thing for her, as she has nothing of her own."

"Oh, that's stuff. Her father was very well off. She has plenty of means."

"I don't think so. At least Mr. Marcham told papa she had nothing. But that was in confidence. I suppose she doesn't know, and you needn't be so kind as to tell her."

"There isn't much confidence about it, now that your father and mother and you and I know," said Fred, coolly. "But I don't believe it all the same. I'll ask the girl."

"You'd better not," said Rosamond, quietly. "And if they are to be married, it does not matter."

"But they're not going to be married," said Fred, hotly. "I tell you the thing's absurd, and they've never thought of it for a moment."

"You are very confident, but if you marry

her it will be the same thing," said Rosamond, bitterly. "Then there won't be anybody to heir Underwood but yourselves."

"I mean to marry her, and they know it; at least Dorothy does," said Fred, tossing down his cigar and sliding off his perch. "As we don't seem to agree very well to-day, Miss Tracy, I think I'll go back to the lawn."

CHAPTER IV.

FRED'S REVENGE.

"YOUR ward is a charming young lady, Mr. Marcham," said Mrs. Tracy, in her sweetest tones. "I am sure she must make a great difference in Underwood."

"In what way, Mrs. Tracy?" asked the Squire, in that quiet way of his. To see him standing unconcernedly sipping his tea and looking so indifferent one would not have imagined the subject was in the least interesting to him. But the deep look in his eyes told a different tale as they turned to where Dorothy sat, the centre of an admiring group, with whom she was talking and laughing merrily, and looking lovely in her animation.

"Oh, come now, Mr. Marcham," said Mrs. Tracy, coquettishly. "Do you mean to say a pretty woman makes no difference in a house?"

"A woman of any kind makes quite a difference," he answered, with a slightly amused smile. "My ward is a very quiet young lady."

"Is she? Look at her now and hear her laugh," said Mrs. Tracy, nodding towards the group under the acacia tree. "No doubt she finds Underwood a little dull, poor girl."

"Has she said so, Mrs. Tracy? I am very sorry, but not surprised. It is dull for a young

girl," said Roger Marcham, and his face clouded a little. "I have offered to get a companion for her, but she will not hear of it."

"She will be all right now Mr. Wellesley has come," she said, significantly. "I saw the difference at once to-day when he was at her side. Is the marriage to be soon? I have heard so."

"I don't know if it is to take place at all. I have not been told," said Roger Marcham, coldly. "I am afraid Dame Rumour has taken time too rudely by the forelock."

"Oh, how oddly you speak. Is the date not really fixed? I am surprised, they seem so utterly devoted to each other, and what an improvement she has made in Fred. Such a sad, idle boy he was, wasn't he, Mr. Marcham? Miss Vance is very proud of her work, Rosamond says, and she has reason to be."

"Dorothy has made a friend of your daughter, then, Mrs. Tracy?"

"Oh, yes; they are inseparable, and Rosamond, dear girl, cannot have one secret from me, and I am glad of it. But I hope I am not telling tales out of school, Mr. Marcham," said Mrs. Tracy, with a little, affected smile. "Girls always have their little secrets about their lovers, you know."

"I suppose so," said Roger Marcham, absently. It was as if a cloud had fallen across the cheerful sunshine of that summer day. Yet why should he care. He had long since told himself he was old and gray, and that he could only expect to be set aside, while others tasted the sweets of life's young prime.

"What a stranger you have been at the Vicar-

age of late, Mr. Marcham," said Mrs. Tracy, presently.

"Have I? I am a busy man, and if my ward comes and goes, you know you are not forgotten at Underwood," he answered.

"Old friends are the dearest, as Rosamond said the other day, when we spoke of you never coming. She misses you from the Vicarage, Mr. Marcham."

"It is very kind of you to say so. It is pleasant to be missed," he answered; but his tone was neither eager nor interested. He was too honest and straightforward to understand the woman's hints, and too generous to suspect her of any plotting.

"Ah, there is Fred! See how he makes for the acacia tree!" laughed Mrs. Tracy. "It will be a good marriage for your ward, Mr. Marcham. You have not had a long term of office as guardian. Will they live at Underwood afterwards?"

Roger Marcham bit his lip. He was tried to the limits of his endurance.

"I really cannot speak definitely about matters which have never been presented to my mind, Mrs. Tracy," he said, courteously but coldly. "It is six o'clock. Would you think it very ungracious of me to leave now?"

"Leave? You have only come, but I see some of them moving. Mr. Marcham, could I trouble you to go through the shrubbery and find Rosamond? I saw her go there a little ago. She must say good-bye to the Maurices. Oh, thanks so much," she added, as he turned readily to grant her request.

Roger Marcham was not sorry to turn his

back on the gay party and be alone even for a moment. He felt amazed at, and impatient with, himself for being so cast down by the woman's talk. He knew it to be unfounded gossip, or, at the best, the merest supposition, and yet the possibility that it might contain a germ of truth made it intolerable to him. Poor Roger Marcham! the maiden from over the sea had indeed made havoc of his peace of mind. He met Rosamond Tracy at the gate leading into the paddock, and she looked surprised to see him.

"Mrs. Tracy has sent me to find you, Miss Rosamond," he said, cheerfully, trying to throw off the depression which weighed upon his spirits. "I think some of the guests are leaving."

"Oh, are they? I wonder what you will think of me, Mr. Marcham, if I say I am very glad? This has been an insufferably stupid afternoon, and I am glad it is over."

Roger Marcham smiled, but did not contradict her. Presumably he had found it so himself. They turned and walked together back to the lawn. Dorothy Vance saw them the moment they came through the shrubbery, and her eyes drooped. She had missed her guardian, and wondered why he had held aloof from her so persistently all afternoon.

"Mrs. Tracy has kindly excused me, Dorothy, and I am going off," he said, when he came to her side. "You and Fred need not hurry; there will be a full moon to guide you back."

"Oh, shall I not go now?" said Dorothy, almost eagerly, rising to her feet.

"No, no, my dear, stay and enjoy yourself

with the others. There is to be a dance by-and-by, and you know I would be of no use then," said Roger Marcham, kindly, but as he would have spoken to a child.

"Very well," she answered quietly, and turned her head away. She was hurt by his words, and fancied he was glad to be rid of her for a time. It was a curious thing how these two misunderstood each other continually, how their oversensitiveness magnified trifles, and their pride made barriers of reserve between them.

There was a pleasant dance for the young people on the lawn in the sweet summer dusk, but the charm of the day was gone for Dorothy Vance, and she was glad when they began to drop away one by one, and she could say to Fred they had better go home. Fred was more than ready, the prospect of the walk through the pleasant field paths with Dorothy as his companion was very bright, and he inwardly blessed his uncle for having the good sense to leave them to themselves.

"He 'll ask her to-night," said Rosamond Tracy to herself, very bitterly, as she stood at the drawing-room window and watched the pair cross the little park. "I can't understand what there is about that little country girl to captivate both uncle and nephew. I wonder which she 'll have?"

"Rather a nice affair, eh! Dorothy?" said Fred to his companion.

"What?" she asked with a start, for her thoughts were not with her companion. "The party? oh, yes, very nice."

"I don't believe you enjoyed it a bit. Don't

be in such a hurry. Let 's go slow. It 's not often I have the chance to walk or talk with you," said Fred, in rather a reproachful voice.

"It is getting dark, and see how wet the grass is. Mr. Marcham always warns me against the dews," she answered, without slackening her pace.

"Oh, of course, anything for him," said Fred, chewing the top of his stick, rather angrily. "Say, Dorothy, haven't I been working like a hatter, lately?"

"Like a what?"

"Oh, well, I beg your pardon; like a galley slave, then. Nine blessed hours every day I sit on that stool, and an uncommon hard stool it is, I can tell you."

"I am glad to hear it, but it is only your duty, Fred."

"Oh, well, that 's poor enough encouragement for a fellow who finds duty an uncommon bore," said Fred. "I don't suppose you had the ghost of an idea what an effort it is for a fellow to be as conscientious as I have been all spring and summer."

"But are you not far happier?" asked the girl, and she lifted her sweet, earnest eyes to his face for a moment. That look made Fred's heart beat and his pulses tingle; he really cared for her, and had honestly endeavoured to do well for her sake.

"Oh, well, I suppose I am. If I thought you cared, or were glad, because I was really grinding, I 'd be happier though," he said, eagerly.

"So I do care. Haven't I always scolded you since I came to Underwood?" she asked,

and her laugh rang out sweet and clear in the still night air. "Of course it is delightful to think one's efforts are bearing fruit, and your uncle is very happy over it, Fred."

"Is he? I don't care a fig for that. The guv. and I never got on very well, Dorothy; he's so uncommon hard on a fellow."

Dorothy said nothing, but her lips shut together in a close, displeased manner, and her eyes flashed a little with indignation. Fred, however, not observing these ominous signs, went on.

"You see, he's always been such a proper model man all his days, he has no sympathy for a fellow who likes a little fun. He thinks a fellow should have Methuselah's head on his shoulders without his years, 'pon honour he does. He's just a trifle antiquated, the guv., though he thinks no end of himself."

"He has been the kindest of friends to you, Fred, and I will not listen when you speak so," said Dorothy, in a low voice. "We will change the subject, if you please."

"Wish you'd stick up for me as you stick up for the guv.," said Fred, ruefully. "I'll tell you what it is, Dorothy, I wish you'd never come to Underwood."

"Why?"

"Oh, just because you sit on a fellow so frightfully, when he's doing his best to please you. What do you suppose I went up to that old office to grind for if not to please you?"

"Well, I am pleased; but I wish you would work for your uncle's sake, and for the sake of working, because it will make you more like him," Dorothy answered candidly. She had not

the slightest idea what Fred was aiming at, or she would not have spoken as she did.

"What an awful lot you think of the guv.," said Fred, a trifle savagely. "Look here, Dorothy, do you mean to have me or not? I like you such a jolly lot, I can't do without you."

"Have you?" The girl repeated the two words in a slow, bewildered fashion, and involuntarily stood still, and looked straight into her companion's face. They were now within the Underwood grounds, and had reached a quaint, little rustic bridge, which spanned the trout stream behind the house. The moon had risen—a glorious moon at its full—and the light was almost as clear as that of the day.

The girl's graceful figure in white, with its rich crimson wraps, stood out well against the shadow of the trees, her face somewhat pale, as if she were tired, was lighted by the radiance of the moon. Looking on that sweet face, Fred Wellesley thought it the loveliest and the dearest in the world. He was in earnest. Dorothy Vance had really touched his heart, and awakened in him some longings after a nobler, manlier life.

"I mean what I say, Dorothy; I love you; will you be my wife?" he repeated, this time yet more earnestly.

"Your wife? Oh, Fred, how can you think of such a thing?" she said, hurriedly, and her colour rose in a fitful wave. "Don't speak about it. It could never be."

"But I will speak about it. I'm in jolly earnest. I thought about it, I believe, the very night you came to Underwood. You are so dif-

ferent from other girls, a fellow couldn't help caring about you. Do say you 'll have me some time, Dorothy, and I 'll work indeed—do anything to please you, indeed I will."

As he spoke the girl's distress increased. He was so evidently in earnest, and her answer could only be an unalterable no.

"Oh, Fred, don't say any more; let us go in. It can't be."

"Not just now, of course, nor for a long time. I only want you to say it 'll be some day," he pleaded, eagerly.

"But I can't say it. I would never care enough for you to marry you. I must be plain, nothing else will satisfy you. Let us go home."

A look of bitter chagrin came into the young man's face, and he struck the parapet of the bridge an angry blow with his cane. He was a hot-headed, impulsive, hastily-spoken youth, not one who could accept a great disappointment philosophically, or even calmly. And, in spite of Rosamond Tracy's words, he had made very sure of his uncle's ward.

"You don't know what you 're doing refusing me, Dorothy," he said in the haste of anger. "You have nothing. If Uncle Roger were to marry, as no doubt he will, what will become of you? You would need to go and earn your own living."

She drew her slight figure up, her face paled, her lips curled in scornful pride.

"I beg your pardon. I was independent before I ever saw your uncle or Underwood," she said, sharply. "I need not make my home here unless I choose. I cannot choose much

longer if I am to be treated as you have treated me."

"I tell you I 'm right," said Fred, throwing prudence to the winds. "He told the Vicar your father left nothing; that you are dependent on him."

The girl's bosom heaved, her face grew paler, until her very lips were white.

"I don't believe it. I shall ask him to-night," she said, with difficulty; she had received a cruel blow.

"And if he marries Miss Tracy, as I believe he will," continued Fred recklessly, seeing the impression he had made, "what can you do? Come, Dorothy, let 's be friends. I would be so good to you, for I *do* care a lot for you; and I didn't mean to hurt you, but what I said is true, you know it is. You can ask him if you like, he couldn't deny it."

But Dorothy did not hear the last words. She turned from him, and with a bursting sob fled up through the park towards the house. And yet, could she go in? If what Fred said were true, had she any corner in the world she could call her own?

CHAPTER V.

A WOUNDED HEART.

DOROTHY VANCE had been very happy at Underwood. She had accepted the sunshine which had fallen across her path without giving the future a thought, or even troubling herself about the often times troublesome question of ways and means. In her Indian home she had been accustomed to every comfort—her father, perhaps unwisely, had never permitted a shadow of his own care to rest upon his only child; had never hinted even that the day might come when she would be obliged to think out the question of mere livelihood for herself. He had left her in absolute faith to his friend, Roger Marcham, but it was not through Roger Marcham the trouble was to come on the child. She was a child in some things, though in others a proud, sensitive, high-souled woman. She was a child certainly in her knowledge of the world, evidenced by her entire belief in what was uttered by Fred Wellesley in a moment of passion. She was so absolutely truthful herself in word, act, and thought that the idea of wilful untruthfulness in others did not readily present itself to her mind. As she sped on towards the house that night one thought was uppermost in her

mind, that she was a burden on her guardian, a burden so keenly felt that he had complained of it to others.

It was a cruel thought. Her cheeks tingled, her eyes filled with bitter, rebellious tears; it was so hard to think that she had remained so long trespassing on an unwilling kindness, only because she was in ignorance of the real state of the case. It was not kind, she said to herself, that Roger Marcham should have extended a half-hearted welcome, should have allowed her to humiliate herself as she had done, accepting his charity as if it were her absolute right. If she had ever given the matter a thought, she had fancied that her father had left ample means, that her residence at Underwood was simply a matter of duty and inclination. She had been left Roger Marcham's ward, and had supposed it the right thing to reside under her guardian's roof. In the first misery and humiliation of her pain, Dorothy Vance was not just to Roger Marcham. It was a curious thing how swift she was to forget all his goodness, his unnumbered acts of courtesy and generous consideration; or, if they were remembered, they were so distorted as to appear like injuries which stabbed her to the heart. Every word or act which by any possibility could be construed into proof of Fred's assertion rose up before the girl's tortured imagination with painful vividness. Before she had reached the house she had convinced herself that she was an intruder, endured rather than welcomed under her guardian's roof. Her sensitive soul writhed under the sting of the obligation which seemed to weigh her down. For nine months she had eaten the bread of

charity as if it had been her own by right. Poor Dorothy Vance! It was as if every bright memory, every happy and beautiful thing in life, had disappeared for ever, leaving only the dark shadows of despair on her heart. The hall door stood wide open, that hospitable door she had loved and looked upon as the entrance to her home. She sped through it with hurried footsteps, like a hunted thing who had no right there. The library door was a little ajar, and at the side of the velvet curtains which hung outside of it a gleam of yellow light indicated that the master was within. As she sped past it, she heard him stirring in the room, and presently a footfall cross the floor. She had reached the drawing-room landing, however, before the curtain was swayed aside and Roger Marcham looked out into the hall. She did not know what made her pause and look over the balustrade; perhaps the thought occurred to her that she might not look upon his face again for long. She admitted to herself, with a pang of self-scorn, as her eyes dwelt for a moment on the grave, somewhat careworn, features, that it was the face she loved best on earth. She did not know with what manner of love her heart was filled, whether she regarded Roger Marcham with the feelings a ward might entertain for a guardian, who was supposed to fill the place of a father, but the love was there, and it made the sting of her humiliation and pain a thousand times harder to bear. As she stood, Fred Wellesley came hastily into the hall.

"All alone, Fred! Where's Dorothy?" she heard Roger Marcham say, but the eagerness

with which he asked the question was quite lost upon her.

"We fell out on the way, and she ran off and left me," Fred answered, curtly.

"You ought not to have allowed that. Were you within the grounds when she left you?"

"Oh, yes, just at the bridge. She can't be many minutes upstairs," Fred answered with a short laugh, as he hung his hat on the rack.

Dorothy wished to hear no more, but hurried on to her own room, and locked the door from within.

"What did you fall out about to-night?" asked Roger Marcham, as his nephew followed him into the library. "I thought you were the best of friends."

"Oh, so we are; but we have our tiffs. She's so jolly hard on a fellow," said Fred, with unblushing coolness. "How did you like the affair to-day?—not badly managed at all, was it? Mrs. Tracy is really a clever woman. She can make a great deal out of nothing."

"She is certainly a successful entertainer," returned Roger Marcham, absently; and then conversation flagged between them. An hour passed, and there was no sign of Dorothy's appearance downstairs. At half-past nine the supper tray was brought into the library as usual. The inmates of Underwood lived quietly, and without ostentation, their meals were very simple, and did not entail much labour on the servants.

"Go upstairs, Martha, and see whether Miss Vance will come down," the master said to the girl who entered the room.

"Yes, sir," she answered, and ran upstairs at

once, but her knock at Miss Vance's door brought no response.

"What 's the matter; what are you knocking there for?" asked the housekeeper, who happened to come downstairs at the moment.

"It 's for Miss Vance. Supper 's in, and the Squire 's been asking for her, Mrs. Maple."

"Oh, well, run down, and I 'll see. I daresay Miss Vance is tired with the long afternoon," said the housekeeper, as she tapped with her own hand at the young lady's door.

"The supper 's in, Miss Dorothy, and the gentlemen are waiting. Are you not well, my dear?" she asked, when she received no reply.

After a moment she heard a movement in the room, and the door was unlocked.

"I was lying down, Maple," Dorothy answered, in a low voice, and holding the door only a little ajar. "Say to Mr. Marcham I have a bad headache, and will not come down to-night."

"I am sorry to hear that, deary. Let me get you a cup of tea," said Maple, kindly, for the young lady quite rivalled the Squire in her affections now.

"Oh, no, thank you; I couldn't drink it—indeed I couldn't. Thank you quite the same."

"Well, let me come and bathe your head, Miss Dorothy. I can't bear to leave you, and the master wouldn't like it."

"Oh, he wouldn't mind," she answered, quickly. "Just leave me, dear Maple. I am going to lie down again; I 'll be all right in the morning."

"Well, if you must have it, miss, I suppose I must go. Good-night, deary; try and get a good

sleep," said Maple, kindly, as she reluctantly went away, little dreaming that she had heard and seen the last of the Squire's ward for many a day.

Fred Wellesley seemed to be in good spirits that night. He talked incessantly, but his uncle gave him only divided attention, and went off early to bed.

"I 'm going up to town by the early train," said Fred, as his uncle left, "so I 'll say good-bye as well as good-night."

"The early train!" said Roger Marcham, with a smile. "That will be an unprecedented feat. Do you think you 'll manage it?"

"Of course I will. Maple knows. She 's to have breakfast for me at half-past six."

"Very well, my boy; I shall be the last to put anything in the way of your industry. It is a great satisfaction to me to see you working so well," said Roger Marcham, kindly.

Fred looked rather abashed. He was conscious that he scarcely deserved these kind words. In his talk with Dorothy Vance he had scarcely been loyal to his uncle, who had ever been his kind and generous friend.

"Oh, don't say anything. I 'm a good-for-nothing fellow," said he, hastily, speaking the truth this time at least. "You 'll be up soon in town, I suppose?"

"Next week. I have promised Dorothy a week in town before the season closes, so we shall be seeing a good deal of you. You deserve a holiday this year, Fred. Good-night. Don't over-sleep yourself, or the joke will be against you."

So they parted for the night.

It was the month of June, when the days were a dream of loveliness and light, the nights laden with the odours of the sweet summer-time, the whole earth blessed with the fulness and the promise of a coming harvest time. How lovely were the early mornings at Underwood! Often had Dorothy stolen out of doors before the household were astir, to enjoy the delicious freshness of the young day. Many a time she had watched the daisies opening under the sun's kiss, and seen the dew-drops glittering in his beams. These early walks had been delightful experiences for her, and had given a healthful stimulus to her whole being. On the morning after the Vicarage garden party, she was astir almost as early as the dawn. The light was breaking greyly into her room as she moved very softly about, gathering a few things together with a curious nervous haste, which indicated a spirit excited and over-wrought. Her face was deadly pale, her eyes encircled with dark rings, her mouth set in a sad but resolute curve. She had lain down for an hour or two on the bed, but had not slept. Her nerves were quite unstrung. She had wrought herself into a state of nervous excitement, which, sooner or later, would wear her out. During these painful hours, imagination had been busy; she had brooded over her fancied wrongs until she saw only one way of escape from them. She must go away from Underwood—where, she did not know or care, only she must go. Surely some where there would be a corner for her, something for her willing hands to do; so she made her resolve, poor girl, without realising the momentous risks to which she was exposing herself. Her ignorance of the great and evil world

misled her here, and she made her resolve without a misgiving or a fear. Anything, she told herself bitterly, would be preferable to eating the bread of charity under Roger Marcham's roof. When she rose, she changed her white dress for one of dark woollen stuff, put on the travelling hat and veil she had worn on board the *Indus*, and into a small hand-bag put a few things most necessary, or most precious to her. She had not very much money to set out seeking her fortune—four sovereigns and a few odd shillings were all her purse contained. When she was quite ready she opened the door softly, and looked out anxiously into the corridor. As she did so, the hall clock struck the half-hour after three. When its echo died away, there was not a sound in the house. She stole downstairs softly, fearing lest the slightest creaking of the stair should alarm and waken any one in the house. In the entrance hall she paused a moment, irresolute. It would be impossible for her to turn the heavy lock of the great door without making a noise which would certainly betray her. In her perplexity she thought of the library windows which opened out upon the terrace. They would be bolted and barred, but the room was not in the vicinity of any sleeping chamber, it might be possible to open them unheard. She crept into the room, and noiselessly shut the door behind her. As she set her bag on the table, and looked at the papers and books there, at the chair pushed back, just as Roger Marcham had risen from it, her mouth trembled. The temptation came upon her to lift his pen and write a word of farewell, but she restrained herself, and moving over to the window, swept back with nervous hand the heavy

curtains which hung down before the shutters. The bolts creaked a little as she removed them, and her heart beat with apprehension. With the haste of fear she unfastened both shutter and window, and threw open one side of the folding door, admitting a glorious flood of sunshine into the room. It was sunrise, and the exquisite radiance dazzled her hot, tired eyes. She caught up her bag, cast a lingering look round the familiar room where so many happy hours had been spent, and with a catching sob stepped out on to the terrace. As she did so, a little bird on a neighbouring bough suddenly burst into song, pouring forth a flood of melody, which, in spite of its very joyousness, brought the tears to Dorothy's eyes. Every living thing was rejoicing except herself.

How fair the summer morning, how indescribable, and how lovely the tints with which the sunrise had adorned the sky, how fresh and sweet the zephyrs, how full of light and beauty that exquisite dawn! But Dorothy saw none of it. Her eyes were full, and when at the turn in the avenue she looked back for the last time at the place she had learned to love as a dear and happy home, she saw it dimly through a mist of blinding tears.

CHAPTER VI.

GONE.

"MERCY me, the house 's been broken into." Such was the exclamation the housemaid uttered when she entered the library shortly after six o'clock that morning. Dorothy, in the haste of her flight, had left the window wide open, without giving a thought to the consternation the appearance of the room might give the maid when she came in to do her work. She looked fearfully round the room, almost expecting to behold a burglar in some corner, and then fled to the housekeeper's parlour, where that good lady was drinking a cup of tea, after having given Fred Wellesley his breakfast. He had just left the house in good time to walk to the railway station. It was not so much the desire to return to work which had caused him to make such an unusal effort, as the reluctance to meet his uncle's ward. He was already ashamed of what he had said, and had an honest intention of writing a letter of apology to Dorothy when he got back to town.

Fred was not a bad-hearted fellow, only weak and foolish, and much given to doing and saying things without thought. But his idle words this time were destined to

bear graver fruits than any he had yet uttered.

He did not brood long over adverse circumstances, but went whistling through the fields that morning feeling as jolly as possible, and wondering at finding early rising so delightful after he was really out of doors.

"Mercy me! Mrs. Maple, if the house hasn't been broken into!" repeated Martha, as she burst into the housekeeper's room.

"Nonsense, girl; how could it?" inquired Mrs. Maple, without much appearance of concern.

"It is, I tell you; come to the library an' see. *You* haven't been in the library, have you, or Mr. Fred?"

"No, I haven't, and I know he hasn't, because he came straight here and had his breakfast, and I went myself with him to the door," returned Maple, rising from her chair. "What's happened in the library?"

"The windows is wide to the wall, that 's all. It gave me quite a turn."

"That 's queer," said Maple. "The master isn't up either. Are you sure you bolted 'em last night — you 're rather careless, you know, Martha?" she added, severely.

"I didn't, but I stood by while the Squire did it, when I went in to light the candles," answered Martha. "Come down and see."

Now rather alarmed, Maple followed Martha downstairs, as fast as her portly figure would allow her, and together they entered the library. Maple went straight to the window and examined the bolts, with some satisfaction to herself.

"There ain't no burglars in it, girl. Who-

ever's opened them bolts has opened 'em from the inside. But who's done it?"

Martha shook her head.

"If they'd been burglars, Martha, them silver candlesticks would ha' been gone, an' the inkstand, an' dear knows what else," said Maple, looking perplexedly round.

Just then her eye fell on something lying just inside the window, and she stooped and picked it up. It was a girl's tan glove, with six pearl buttons at the wrist.

"What do you suppose is the meanin' o' this, Martha? That's Miss Dorothy's glove?" she asked, with a broad smile.

"Maybe she's out for one of her walks, an' left the window open," suggested Martha, smiling too.

"Of course, and you're a silly fool to come troubling a person with your nonsense. The house broke into, indeed! Not while I'm in it," said Maple, and marched off in high dudgeon.

Eight o'clock was the breakfast hour at Underwood. Roger Marcham was surprised to find himself first in the dining-room that morning; he was accustomed to find his ward in her place every morning when he came downstairs. He waited for some time, and even strolled out to the terrace to see if she was about the grounds, and so half an hour passed. This was such an unusual occurence, that, meeting the housemaid in the hall as he went in, he asked her to go up and ask whether Miss Vance was quite well.

"Oh, sir, I think Miss Vance is out; at least, the library window was open very early," she returned, smiling at the remembrance of her

alarm, "and she had dropped her glove on the way out. Mrs. Maple found it on the sill."

"It is unusual for Miss Vance to be so late, she is usually so punctual," said the Squire. "Run up, Martha, and see whether she has not come back."

"Very well, sir," returned Martha, and hastened up to Miss Vance's room. She was not surprised to find the door half open, but when she ventured in she stared in amazement. The bed was untouched, the white coverlet was straight and unruffled, as Dorothy had carefully smoothed it when she rose.

It was Martha's work to make the beds while the dining-room breakfast was going on. Little wonder, then, that she stood amazed.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, and ran to Mrs. Maple again to seek an explanation.

"You haven't been in Miss Dorothy's room, have you, Maple? This is the queerest mornin'! I wish you'd come and look, for I don't think she's slept in her bed, and the master's asking for her. It's nearly nine o'clock."

"Goodness, girl, you'll have an end o' me wi' your scares," said Mrs. Maple, in an aggrieved voice. Nevertheless she quickly followed Martha to the room, and regarded it with genuine alarm.

"No, it hasn't been slept in," she said. "What on earth is the meanin' o' this? I must go and speak to the master myself."

So saying, Maple made haste, much flurried, to the dining-room, where the Squire was waiting with some impatience for his breakfast.

"Ah, Maple, good morning. Is Miss Dorothy well enough? She is very late."

"Well enough, sir? dear only knows. She ain't in the house, an' Martha an' me 's just been up to her room, sir, an' she hasn't been in it all night; leastways she 's not been in bed."

"What?"

"It 's true, sir. I never got such a turn. Did Martha tell you about the library windows being open at six o'clock this morning?"

"She said something about it, and about a glove being found. Was that before Mr. Fred went away?"

"No, sir; immediately after. I had just seen him out o' the door, an' was sittin' down to a cup o' tea, when Martha comes runnin' up like a scared thing, saying there was burglars in the house. When I goes down, sir, the windows is open sure enough, but they was open from the inside, an' there 's the glove I picked up. It 's Miss Dorothy's, sir. She had 'em on yesterday with her white frock, which is lyin' all crumpled up on the floor."

During her speech, Maple had brought herself up to a pitch of excitement which found relief in tears. Roger Marcham took the dainty glove from her hand, crushed it in his own, and with set, stern face strode upstairs to see for himself the room they said his ward had deserted. It was just as Maple had described it, and a fearful anxiety laid hold upon the man's heart. He was not only anxious, he was completely astounded, for in all his imagination he could find no explanation for this extraordinary freak of his ward.

That was a strange morning at Underwood. Every corner in the house was searched, and the grounds explored also, but without avail. Then

a messenger was sent over to the Vicarage to ask a question which set the inmates in a flutter of excitement. It was a strange thing to be asked, whether Miss Vance had spent the night at the Vicarage, but when Mrs. Tracy tried to get some information out of the groom, she met with no success. He had been enjoined by his master not to wait, nor answer any questions, but only to find out whether anything was known about Miss Dorothy there, and ride back at once. When the man brought word that they had seen or heard nothing of her since she left the Vicarage with Fred Wellesley at half-past eight on the previous night, Roger Marcham himself mounted his horse and rode off to the railway station at Morton.

"Good morning, Cunliffe," he said to the station-master, who ran out to learn the Squire's business. "Had you many passengers by the early train this morning?"

"Not a soul except Mr. Wellesley, an' I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw him come whistling into the station at six forty-five," said the station-master with a smile.

"You are quite sure no lady took ticket here?"

"Quite sure, sir, for I was on the platform all the time, but I'll ask the clerk," returned Cunliffe, in some surprise; and went off to the office at once.

In a few moments he came back, shaking his head.

"Nobody but Mr. Fred took a ticket this morning, sir. Pardon me, but you look worried. Is it any trouble, sir?"

"Trouble? Yes. I am in torture, Cunliffe. The most extraordinary thing has happened. My

ward, Miss Vance, has disappeared from Underwood; and I came down, hoping she had only gone up to town for the day with my nephew," said the Squire, unable to hide his alarm.

"Oh, sir, she may have gone to see some friends, maybe down to Midgate," said Cunliffe, reassuringly. "Did she not say anything like that?"

"No, but you are right. It is quite possible she may have gone to Midgate," said the Squire, giving his impatient horse the rein. "Say nothing about it in the meantime, Cunliffe."

"All right, sir; good morning," said the station-master, with a respectful touch of his cap. As the Squire rode out of the station gate he met Mr. Tracy, who looked anxious and uneasy.

"What's this I hear, Mr. Marcham?" he said, stopping straight before the Squire's impatient horse. "What has happened at the Hall? Is anything wrong with Miss Vance?"

"I cannot tell, Mr. Tracy. She has left us; why or wherefore I cannot tell," said Roger Marcham, wearily. "I wish I knew what it meant. She must have gone either in the night or very early this morning, but what could be her object? You saw her more lately than I. Did she not seem in good spirits when she left the Vicarage?"

"In excellent spirits; in fact she was the life of the party," said the Vicar. "You can think of nothing which could make her leave?"

"Nothing. She seemed happy and at home with me. She said sometimes she was," said Roger Marcham, hopelessly. "I cannot understand it, and I am quite at a loss what to do."

"If you find no clue you had better go up to London and see your nephew. He was in conversation with her last you say?"

"He was. I'm riding round to Midgate to see whether she was observed at the railway station there this morning. If London was her destination (though I cannot for the life of me imagine why she should go there) she would naturally avoid Norton, knowing Fred was going from here this morning. They had some words last night on the way home, he told me. I wonder if that could have anything to do with it? Do you think they are attached to each other?"

"Miss Vance cares nothing at all for your nephew. I believe I am right in saying her whole affection is given to you," said the Vicar, warmly, for he saw that his friend was in sore need of some comfort. Roger Marcham shook his head.

"Then why should she leave me? I must go on, Tracy. I cannot stand this frightful suspense. Pray that this strange mystery may be cleared up."

"I will. God bless you!" was the Vicar's fervent response, and then Roger Marcham rode off at a gallop. In his state of mind inaction was misery. His inquiries at Midgate proved of no avail. It was market day in the town, and the early trains had brought a large number of country folk in, rendering the station so busy, that the arrival or departure of one individual could not have been noticed. Roger Marcham put up his horse at the Station Hotel, and, telegraphing his intention to Underwood, took the noon train for London. Before two o'clock he was in the office in Mincing Lane.

He found Fred Wellesley at his desk as usual, and evidently bent upon his work.

"Hulloa! Uncle Roger!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "What brings you here in such a hurry?"

"Come into my room, Fred," was his uncle's brief response, and Fred followed, with a vague feeling that something serious had brought him to town.

"Do you know anything about Dorothy, Fred?" was the first unexpected question, asked the moment the door was shut upon them.

"Dorothy! What about her?" exclaimed Fred. "Has anything happened to her?"

"Heaven only knows! She has gone away from Underwood, and we can find no trace of her anywhere."

The ruddy colour died out of the lad's face, and his hand shook. Conscience-stricken, he dared not look into his uncle's face.

"She did not sleep in the house last night," continued Roger Marcham, "and the maids found the library windows open at six o'clock this morning. I came up to ask about the quarrel you had last night. What was it about? and did you part in anger? In the first place, is there any understanding between you?"

"No; but I'll tell you all I know. I asked her last night to marry me, and she refused," said Fred, in a low voice.

"Yes, and what more? How did she leave you?"

"I must tell you the whole of this miserable business, Uncle Roger," cried Fred, in real distress. "I got mad when she said she didn't care about me, and I said if she didn't have me

she 'd lose a good chance, or something like that, because she was dependent on you, and if you married she would have no home."

"By what right did you make any such statement in my name?" asked Roger, in a cold, stern voice, his face white with righteous anger.

"I don't know. Rosamond Tracy told me all that, and I didn't care last night what I said," said Fred, in a low voice.

"And how did she receive your information?" asked Roger Marcham, in a choking voice.

"She said it wasn't true, that she 'd ask you. She seemed to feel it awfully, for I believe she cares no end for you," said Fred, taking a curious delight in telling the worst. "She ran off to the house, and I never saw her again."

"May God forgive you, boy, for your cruel thoughtlessness," said Roger Marcham, hoarsely, and great beads of perspiration stood on his brow. "I tremble to think what a sensitive, high-souled girl such as Dorothy might be tempted to do in such circumstances. Pray that the consequences of your wicked folly may not be more than you or I can bear."

CHAPTER VII.

A SAFE HAVEN.

DOROTHY VANCE was not likely ever to forget the walk she took through field and meadow that June morning. As she walked leisurely along the narrow paths, brushing the dew drops from the wild-flowers with her skirts as she passed, she was keenly alive, even in the midst of her perplexity and care, to the extreme beauty surrounding her. It was one of the finest of summer mornings. The sun, early astir, poured a perfect flood of warm, golden radiance on the waking earth, every blossom opened its smiling eyes, every bird and bee made melody among flowers and trees; it was a happy dawn. Dorothy had her watch with her, and a pocket time-table, which she consulted sitting on a stile which separated the lands of Underwood from those of the Earl of Midgate. From it she learned that the train leaving Norton at 6.50 was due at Midgate at 7.15. She had ample time to reach the town before then, but the question arose, would Fred see her? The station would probably be quiet so early in the morning, the chances were that she could scarcely move along the platform and take her seat without being seen. If she were once in the train, she knew all would be right,

for at Euston there would be no fear of meeting Fred. In a throng her safety lay. She pondered the thing sitting on the stile, with her little bag hanging on the gatepost, and her hat lying in her lap. She was hot and tired, the fresh morning zephyr was grateful to her weary eyes. She roused herself presently with an effort; eyes and heart had travelled, in spite of herself, over the fields to Underwood. She could see the square tower in the far distance, standing above the fresh green of the tree-tops. Somehow she felt less bitter against Roger Marcham this morning. She remembered more of his goodness and generous kindness. She was more just than she had been in the first agony of her wounded pride. She was thinking of him when the bell in Norton steeple rang five. If she intended to catch the early train at Midgate, she had no time to lose, for she had still seven good miles to walk. She dragged her tired limbs from the stile, tied on her hat, listlessly lifted her bag, and trudged on. She was bound for London; but what to do there, or where to go in the great city, was a question she had not yet faced. The first object was to get away from Underwood, to put miles between Roger Marcham and herself.

She kept to bye-paths and unfrequented roads, of which there were plenty in that neighbourhood, and avoided all chance of being seen. From the moment she quitted the Hall until she entered the streets of Midgate she did not encounter a living soul. The market town, however, was very busy, the square where the market was held already presented an animated appearance. The farmers' carts were all in, and

the farmers' sons and daughters arranging their dairy produce on their stalls. The air was laden with the perfume of flowers and fruit and the baskets of strawberries among their cool green leaves. Dorothy bought one and a few biscuits before she went into the station, which she was glad to reach, and lie down for a few minutes on the hard sofa in the waiting-room. She had hurried very much during the last part of her journey, and arrived half-an-hour before the train was due. But she was completely worn out, and the moment her head touched the pillow she was fast asleep. The violent ringing of the bell and the hubbub of an arriving train aroused her, and she had only time to rush for a ticket, and jump into the train just as it started. Fred Wellesley was hanging out of the window of his compartment, but did not observe the slight figure step hastily through the crowd and disappear into a carriage.

Within the hour the train puffed into Euston, and Dorothy had reached the first stage of her destination. But what next? She had a vague idea that it would be possible for her to earn a living as a governess. She was an accomplished musician, but she little dreamed, poor girl, of the hundreds quite as capable seeking in vain for similar occupation in London. She emerged from the station, and going into the first restaurant ordered breakfast, for she was faint from want of food. The warm food refreshed her and gave her a new courage. The woman who served her, an elderly person with a kind face and pleasant manner, looked at her curiously as she took out her purse to pay. She was a lady it was easy to see. Perhaps it was natural

for the woman to wonder what she was doing there alone.

"It 's a fine morning, miss," she said, pleasantly, as she went with her to the door. "You 'll enjoy a walk this morning, it 's so sunny and clear."

"Yes, but I am tired. I am a stranger in London," she said, impelled to ask a word of help from the woman. "Perhaps you can tell me where I can find the nearest agency or register where I can inquire for a situation?"

"What kind of a situation, miss?"

"As a governess or music teacher."

The woman shook her head.

"Don't do that, miss. There 's too many of them. You 'd be better as a nurse in some nice family, but I don't think you are used to work."

"I have certainly led a very idle life hitherto," the girl answered, with a faint smile. "But I must work now."

"Friends dead?"

"Yes, all dead."

"Ah, that 's bad. Do you know anybody in London?"

"Not a creature."

"That 's worse. You are too pretty and too young to go about here alone. There 's an agency at Bell's Causeway, two streets off. You might go there and inquire. And if you don't mind comin' back, I 'll let you have a bit o' dinner cheap. I can't bear to see young people like you wanderin' about lookin' for work. I 'd like to hear how you get on."

"Thank you," said Dorothy, litting pathetic, grateful eyes to the woman's face. "I shall be sure to come back; and as to the dinner," she

added, with a faint smile, "I can pay the usual sum for it. I have a little money, which I hope will last me till I get something to do."

Her new friend shook her head and went back into the shop with a troubled look on her face. She was a country woman, not yet hardened into city ways; her heart was large and hospitable. Perhaps that was the reason why, though her restaurant was popular, she made so little profit. She erred in generosity rather than in meanness towards her customers. But she was happy and contented, and so long as she managed to make both ends meet did not trouble herself about large profits. Dorothy Vance was not the first friendless girl she had helped forward in the struggle for existence.

Dorothy had left her bag at the restaurant, and though she was eager to find something to do, somehow she seemed to lack energy even to go in search of it. She was worn out in body and mind, and her heart had gone back with painful longing to the dear home she had left. A wish began to form in her mind, a regret that she had not been fair and open with Roger Marcham, and asked for confirmation or denial from his own lips. Even for the kindness he had shown, she told herself he was entitled to that. She went out of her way in her preoccupied mood, and it took her nearly an hour to reach the office, though she might have walked the distance in twenty minutes. When she entered the place, a very pert, but business-like young woman, rather patronisingly asked what she wanted.

"A governess's place? Oh, yes, we have several on our books. Half-a-crown, please, to

enter your name as an applicant, and then I 'll give you the addresses, then half-a-crown when you are suited. These are our terms, and they are very moderate, considering that our business is with the best families. What are your qualifications, miss?"

"I am afraid I cannot say proficient in anything except music and drawing," said Dorothy, faintly. "May I sit down, please? I am very tired."

"Oh, certainly sit down. Well, here is one, I think, which might suit," said the young woman, running her finger down a long list of names in the ledger. "Mrs. St. Clair Goodwin, 14 Elmira Villas, Clapham. She laid special stress on the music, I remember. There are five children, and the salary is fourteen pounds."

"Fourteen pounds? Surely that is very little. Our housemaid——" began Dorothy, and quickly checked herself. But the young woman looked at her with curious suspicion.

"When you have no languages you won't get any more," she said, severely, yet with a kind of easy familiarity which somehow annoyed Dorothy. "Well, will you take the address? But I may tell you Mrs. St. Clair Goodwin will be very particular about references. She is one of our most fastidious customers."

"Clapham—is that far?" Dorothy asked, ignoring the insinuation contained in the woman's speech.

"A good bit. You will get the underground train in the next street. What is your name, please?"

"Dora Verney," replied Dorothy, but her colour rose, and she hastily drew down her veil.

"All right—Miss Dora Verney. Will you go out to Mrs. St. Clair Goodwin's just now?"

"Yes, if I can get a train."

"Oh, there are trains every five minutes. You'll let me know if you are suited. Your address, please?"

"Oh, I have no address. I have just come from the country to-day."

"But you must be staying somewhere. I must have an address, miss."

"Well, twenty-three Gisborne Street," said Dorothy, giving the number of the place where she had breakfasted. "Good-morning."

So saying, she walked out of the office, with cheeks burning, and a curiously humiliated feeling in her heart. She had not thought there would be so many unpleasant things connected with the search for work. Poor Dorothy, she had scarcely tasted the bitterness of that thankless task, as she proved an hour later, when she was being interviewed by Mrs. St. Clair Goodwin in the drawing-room of many colours at number fourteen Elmira Villas. The lady anxious to secure the services of an accomplished governess for the sum of fourteen pounds was a large, pale, over-dressed woman, with a patronising style and a languid mode of speech, which seemed to indicate a kind of tolerant contempt for the whole world, and for governesses in particular.

"Oh, you are a person from the register," she said, when the slight, pale, young creature was ushered into her presence. "Well, what are your qualifications for the post you are seeking?"

"I believe I am a good musician. I have had the best of teachers," said Dorothy, falter-

ingly, for her courage and hope were now at the lowest ebb. "I have had a good English education, and I would do my best, madam, if you would engage me."

"It requires consideration. I am afraid you are too young and inexperienced to maintain the discipline I like. My children are very high-spirited, especially Adeline, the eldest, a beautiful girl, Miss—Miss Verney, and possessing exceptional talents. She is with Saldini for music. You would require to superintend her practice, and teach her all other branches, while you would, of course, have the entire charge of the other four. All the governesses I have had have had the care of their wardrobes. I hope you are a good needlewoman, and can shape garments for children."

"Is that a governess's usual work, madam?" Dorothy felt impelled to ask.

There was nothing impertinent in the question, but it seemed to displease Mrs. St. Clair Goodwin.

"I left all particulars with the person at the office, just to save myself the needless answering of questions," she said, stiffly. "If you are not prepared to undertake the work you may go, Miss Verney. There are hundreds who will gladly accept a home in a refined Christian family such as this."

"I beg your pardon if I have offended you. I only wish to know all that would be expected, and whether I could undertake it conscientiously," Dorothy forced herself to say, seeing she was losing ground. "What ages are the children?"

"Adeline is twelve, Leonard, the youngest, is

five," answered Mrs. Goodwin, somewhat mollified. "But what kind of references have you? In what sort of a family have you been serving before? I am very particular about the morals of any person who comes in contact with my children, and insist that my nurse shall be a pious woman, and go regularly to the chapel. I should require my governess to follow her example."

"I have never been a governess before," said Dorothy, rising, for she felt that the interview might come to an end.

"Oh, have you not? Are you in reduced circumstances? Of course you will have references from a clergyman, or some other responsible person?" said Mrs. Goodwin, with a distrustful gleam in her hard eyes.

"I have no references. I am quite alone and friendless. I suppose it will be difficult to find any one to trust me," said Dorothy, with a slight bitterness of tone, and drawing down her veil to hide the tears which trembled on her eyelash.

"You are right. There must be something questionable about a person who cannot find a creature to recommend her," said Mrs. Goodwin, righteously. "Good-morning, Miss Verney. Take the advice of one who knows what duty is, and who does it with all her might, and go back to your friends. I shall go into town this morning, and reprimand the register people for having a person without references on their lists. One has to be so careful in choosing a companion or instructress for young people, that every precaution must be taken."

Dorothy's cheeks flamed with indignation, but

she did not trust herself to speak. When she got outside the immaculate gates of Mrs. St. Clair Goodwin's abode she gave way to a burst of weeping. Happily it was a quiet thoroughfare, and no one observed her emotion. It was afternoon before she found her way back to Gisborne Street. Strange that she should look upon that poor little place as a haven of refuge, because in it a womanly woman had uttered a word of sympathy and kindness.

"Come away, miss, I was gettin' anxious about you," said the good soul, who had been strangely drawn by the sweet face and winning way of the young girl. "Bless me, how done you look. Did you find it as tough a job as I said? Ay, ay, cry away, poor thing; it'll do ye good. Just come into my back place, and we'll have a talk over it and a cup of tea. This is my quiet time, afore folks come in seekin' their teas. There's folks as has had their teas reg'lar in the shop for ten year, an' wouldn't take it no place else. That's the kind of business I like—customers that's friends as well. Ay, ay, you do look tired."

Dorothy followed her kind friend into a snug little back room furnished in chintz, and with a little muslin curtained window looking out on a green strip of grass in the back yard. A cheerful little fire crackled in the grate, and the kettle was singing on the hob, on the mantel shelf were curious and quaint little ornaments such as you see in country cottages, and there were a few flowers in a tall glass jug on the little table, and the whole place was homely and comfortable in the extreme.

"Sit down on the sofa, my deary, and I'll get

the tea in no time," said the good soul, bustling about pleasantly. This was an opportunity just after her own heart. Dorothy sat down on the pretty chintz sofa, and laid her head down on the pillow. She felt at that moment that she would not have exchanged that humble room, made bright by the sunshine of that happy, helpful heart, for the palace of a king. She felt as if, after being tossed about on some tempestuous sea, she had anchored in a sure haven of peace and safety.

They had a long talk over their cosy cup of tea, and it came to pass that Dorothy Vance slept that night in the chintz-covered room, and not that night only, but many nights following.

In the great wilderness of London her feet had been guided, and she had found a home.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HAPPY ENDING.

THE year was drawing to a close. The trees were all brown and bare, the December frosts had nipped the leaves even in sheltered corners, and given a brighter tinge of red to the dogberry and the hollies. There was a prospect of fine skating at Norton, and of a jolly hard Christmas, when there could be enjoyment both without and within. So hard was the frost during Christmas week that the trout stream in the Underwood grounds was frozen over for the first time within its master's memory. It was a pretty picture down at the rustic bridge, from which the icicles hung in all sorts of fantastic shapes, to watch the filmy lacework of the hoar frost on the bare boughs, and among the leaves of the evergreens. The place even in winter had a beauty all its own. The path by the trout stream was a favourite walk with Roger Marcham. Many a pleasant hour he had spent there with basket and rod—in the long summer days, with his ward at his side. The place was filled with associations and memories of her, and for that reason was full of painful interest to him. He loved it, and yet to come there after the desolation had fallen on Underwood was to him a

source of keenest pain. By the end of December, six months after Dorothy's disappearance, he was absolutely without hope of ever looking upon her face again. Perhaps that was natural, seeing that every means he had taken to discover a clue to her whereabouts or her fate had been absolutely without success. He had spared no expense, the best skill the metropolis could afford had been placed at his disposal, but in vain. The missing girl had been traced to London—that is, it was ascertained at Midgate that a person answering to the description had taken a third-class ticket for London at the booking-office at Midgate, and there all inquiry had come to an abrupt end. Nobody had seen her at Euston or any intervening station, and to seek for a quietly-dressed young woman in London was rather a hopeless task.

The strange and anxious trial which had come upon Roger Marcham had wrought in him a great change. Those who loved him were amazed and grieved that he should lay the thing so terribly to heart. It was in vain they assured him he had nothing with which to reproach himself; that he had been more than kind to the girl who had treated him with such a strange ingratitude. It was the nature of the man to lay blame to himself. He tortured his imagination with recalling what he was pleased to think the indifference and lack of sympathy with which he had treated her; things which existed solely in his imagination, and had not the remotest foundation in fact. Perhaps it was not surprising that a coolness had existed between Roger Marcham and his nephew since that unhappy day on which Dorothy Vance left

Underwood. Altogether matters were in a very unsatisfactory state when the year drew to its close.

It was the day before Christmas, a fine, clear, frosty morning, in which it was a perfect delight to be alive and out of doors. The ground rang clear and crisp under the tread; the fine sharp air was more exhilarating than a draught of wine; the sky was blue and brilliant; it was a choice winter day. After his solitary breakfast, Roger Marcham left the house, and, with the dogs at his heels, strolled down to the old bridge. His face, worn with the anxiety and misery of the past months, wore a far-off expression, which had in it a touch of pain. He was recalling last Christmas, which had been so royally kept at Underwood in honour of his ward. How gracefully she had taken her place at his right hand at the festivities, and how keenly she seemed to enjoy her first Christmas on English soil! He could not endure the thought of the morrow, the chime of the Christmas bells would be a discord in his ears. For where would the child his dead friend had entrusted to his care be spending her Christmas Day? With such questions as these did Roger Marcham torment himself. He followed the windings of the stream, the dogs running on its frozen and uneven surface, until it lost itself in the lake, on which he had taught his ward to skate. He did not linger there, however—the memory of these delightful mornings was not pleasant to him now—but called to the dogs ranging through the thickets, and turned his step towards the house. He had not gone many yards when he caught the flutter of a calico gown among the trees,



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and presently Martha, the housemaid, came running breathless along the path by the river-side.

"Would you come up, sir? There is a person wishing to see you from London, and she is in a hurry. She wants to go back, she says, by the twelve train, and it's after ten now."

"She?—is it a lady, Martha?"

"Yes; at least a woman, sir; like a tradesman's wife, I think. Very nice and pleasant, but she seems to be excited about something."

"She did not tell you her business?"

"No, sir."

"Perhaps one of my London tenants. My agent tells me they are always threatening to come down and interview me about their grievances. The frost is very hard this morning, Martha."

"Yes, sir."

"The dogs are rather mystified over the ice here," he said, pointing to the frozen stream. "I'll cross the park straight then, as the person is in such a hurry," said the Squire, and strode over the frosted grass without the remotest prevision of what he was about to hear. It never occurred to him to connect the visit of the stranger in any way with his lost ward.

Martha had put the woman in the little breakfast parlour in which the Squire had chosen to have his meals since he had been again left alone. A bright fire was burning there, and when Roger Marcham entered it he saw the woman, a stout, motherly-looking person, sitting, warming her hands before the comfortable blaze.

She got up rather nervously when the door

opened, and dropped an old-fashioned curtsey to the grave, gentlemanly-looking man who entered. As she did so, however, she looked at him keenly, with a pair of very shrewd, though kindly, grey eyes.

"Mr. Marcham, sir?" she said, inquiringly. "It's Mr. Marcham I want to see."

"I am Mr. Marcham," answered the Squire, courteously. "Pray sit down, and tell me what I can do for you. It is a cold morning for such an early journey as you must have taken. You have come from London, I think."

"Yes, and it is cold, but I didn't mind it much. I don't mind it at all, now I've got here," said the woman, with a curious little nod of satisfaction; then she opened a very large black bag, and took from it an envelope, carefully wrapped in brown paper.

"Would you look at that, please, sir, and tell me if you know the writing, or anything about it. I don't, but if you do, perhaps it'll be all right."

In some amazement Roger Marcham took the envelope in his hand, but the moment his eye fell on what was written on it, he gave a great start. It was his own name and address, written in full by the hand of his ward.

"Where did you get this, woman?" he asked, hoarsely. "Do you know who wrote it?"

"Yes, I know. I'm right, I see," said the woman, beginning to smile. "The person who wrote that, bless her poor dear heart, is in my house. Could you sit down, sir, till I tell you all about it? Yes, she's alive an' well, at least middlin' well. I don't know a thing about anything, but I see you're gaspin' to know *that*,"

said the good soul, with a familiarity which was not at all offensive. "Will you give me time, sir, to tell my story?"

"I'll try, since you have so far relieved my mind. I do not know who you are, or how you have been connected with her who wrote this, but I shall never forget that you have given me the first ray of light in this unhappy business. Please go on."

The woman nodded to herself several times, and, sitting down, clasped her hands on her knee and began—

"It was in the summer, sir, the month o' June, just at the time o' the great heat there was such a speakin' about, that there came into my shop—I keep a little eatin' house, sir, in Gisborne Street, off Euston Square—early in the mornin' afore nine, a bit slip of a young lady, carrying a bag, and lookin' very hot, and tired, and white, poor lamb, and asked for a cup of tea and some bread and butter. I served her myself, 'cos my gal had just left me, and a good riddance, and the one that came for an hour or two in the day-time was late; so I served her myself. She drank up the tea, but ate nothing, and I couldn't but look at her with pity, she was that young an' sweet, an' seemed so sad. I went to the door with her when she was goin', an' spoke a bit word about the weather to her, an' she asked me did I know any place where she could look after a situation as a governess, or sich like. I told her of a place, but I advised her not—there's so many, sir, an' it's such a poor, hopeless sort of thing. I've known o' more'n one who broke their hearts in it. But she went away, promisin' to come back an' tell me how she got on. I

thought of her all day, sir, she was such a pretty creatur', and seemed so sorrowful, an' when she told me her friends were all dead, my heart was sore for her. The day was well on afore she came back, an' I knowed the moment I set eyes on her how she 'd fared. I 've seen that kind o' hopeless look in too many young faces in London, which is jes' old Babylon over again, as I allus say. Well, she came in an' was very broken down an' tired like, an' she had tea with me, and after a bit talk she went to bed in my little room. I 'm very particular about strangers, sir, but I knowed she were the right sort, an' I seed there were some sore trouble vexin' her heart. She never told me anything about herself, except that her father an' mother died in India, an' I know'd she was a lady by her look an' ways, an' I couldn't ask her questions. But somehow, sir, I didn't feel as if I needed to know all about her, she had such a way with her, just like a child for faith an' trust, and I couldn't bear the idea of her goin' away again. She said she 'd stop till she 'd get a place, but after a bit we never spoke about her goin', so she stopped an' stopped, an' there she is still."

"May God bless you!" fell fervently from the lips of Roger Marcham.

The woman nodded and went on. "No doubt she was glad o' the place an' the shelter, though my place is a poor little corner, but she was o' the greatest use to me, sir, an' has always been. There was nothing the child wouldn't do, sir, though she was a lady born, an' I 've never been so well off, or my legs so saved since ever I had the shop; but there was one thing I never let her do, nor wouldn't—go into the shop to serve the

folks. I knew, though she was so willin', that it wasn't the place for her, an' that's the only pint, sir, on which her an' me didn't agree. We were very happy together, sir, although we knew nothing about each other till that day. I never know'd a more willin' helpful creatur' in my whole life. I got to be as fond o' her as if she 'd been my own, but I never asked, nor she never told, nothin' about her past. 'It's all done with,' she used to say, but I watched her a good bit, an' I saw quite well that she carried a sore heart often, and that something seemed to be troublin' her. She got to have such an anxious look, sir, and a bit droop to her lips, that it vexed me more than I can tell to see it. But she never spoke, nor I never asked, but one day I found that envelope accidental, and I made bold to keep it, and put it away out o' sight. I said to myself, sir, that if anything came over her I had somebody I could go to. But still I never spoke, nor did she, an' so the summer wore away, an' it came the darker days, an' then I thought my darlin' gettin' very thin an' white. Excuse me, sir, for callin' her my darlin', but you see I had got to love her as if she were my own. Still I never spoke, but kep' watchin' her, an' I saw the droopin' lip, an' the wistful eyes, an' the listless way o' goin' about, an' I said to myself—my precious, that can't go on. I saw as well as I 'd been told, sir, that something, whatever it was, was preyin' on her mind, an' she says to me one day quite suddenly, jes' as if the words had got out all of themselves—'I believe I did wrong.' Then I looks up quietly an' I says, says I, 'Dora, my lamb, if you think so, I know you 'll set to work to mend that wrong.'

"Then her colour rose up very red, an' her eyes got wet, an' she says, with a bit sad shake o' her pretty head, 'It is too late now, Aunt Judith, and I am very happy with you.'

"I says not another word, sir, but I thinks the thing over an' over in my mind, an' after a deal o' thinkin' I comes down here to see if I could do anything, not knowin' whether it wouldn't be a fool's errand. Do you know my Dora, Mr. Marcham, or can you tell me anything about her or her folks? Is there anybody you know of that 's a-hungerin' to see her, as I see she 's a-hungerin' to see somebody, in spite o' the bit o' pride, or whatever it is, that 's in my darlin's heart."

And good Aunt Judith wiped away a sympathetic tear from her kindly eye.

"May God for ever bless and reward you," said Roger Marcham, grasping her two hands firm and fast in his own. "You have kept, and will restore to me, I trust, my greatest earthly treasure. But, come, at the risk of hurrying you away, we must go and get that train; we can settle upon the way."

So saying, Roger Marcham rang the bell, ordered a hasty refreshment for the stranger, and bade them bring the carriage to the door at once.

He was like a man who had obtained a new lease of life. The maid could not but wonder what had wrought the change. Within the hour they were seated in a private first-class compartment of the London train, and there Roger Marcham unfolded to the kind woman, the story of Dorothy's flight. He told her the story in its entirety. She had earned the right to his con-

fidence, and he gave it gladly. She was a poor, uneducated woman, but she had a heart of gold, and had rendered to Roger Marcham a service which he could never forget, or think of lightly. Had she not saved his ward from untold temptations and hardships? He could have kissed the toilworn palm, in token of his gratitude and honour. Although it was early in the day when they reached Euston, a thick fog hung so low over the city that gas lamps were lighted in the streets, as well as in every shop and warehouse. Roger Marcham accompanied his new friend to Gisborne Street with a beating heart. He could scarcely realise that in a few minutes he should look upon the sweet face he had so missed from his home.

"Just follow me, sir; she'll be in the back room; we're never busy at this time," said Aunt Judith, in an excited whisper, when they reached the door. Then she marched boldly in, and met Dorothy just at the door of the inner room. The little passage between the two places was in shadow, so that Roger Marcham was hidden.

"Back again so soon, Aunt Judith!" Dorothy said, and the sweet voice went to the heart of Roger Marcham like the most exquisite music.

"Yes, my deary, here I am; an' here's somebody with me, who, I think, wants to see you much more than I want to. Here he is," said Aunt Judith, tremblingly, and then fairly turned about, and, sitting down on a chair in the shop, began to cry.

Dorothy stood still with a half-frightened look, as the tall figure emerged from the shadows. Then a strange, low cry, rung through the room,

the door was shut, and Aunt Judith heard no more.

* * * * *

"My guardian has forgiven me, Aunt Judith, and he wants to say, what I never can, what I never will attempt to say, that we shall never forget what you have done for me."

It was Dorothy who spoke, and though her voice was trembling, there was the light of a strange and exquisite joy on her face. She had her hands folded on Roger Marcham's arm, and his hand, firm, kind, and true, was clasped above them. The other he held out to Judith Rainsford, but for the moment he was not able to speak. They did indeed owe to that kind-hearted woman an unspeakable debt of gratitude.

"Oh, it 's all right, it 's all right, but you 'll have your teas surely afore you go. I suppose you 'll be a-goin' to-night?"

"Yes," said Roger Marcham, finding his voice at last. "And so are you!"

"Me! where to?"

"Underwood. You must come and look after 'your darlin',' you know, until she becomes mine altogether. We are going to be married, Aunt Judith, so we 'll shut up shop, shall we, and go?"

"Oh, I couldn't, sir. It wouldn't be fair to them that 's been my friends so long, To leave them without their teas, sir, would be so cruel."

"Never mind. We don't stir a foot without her, do we, Dorothy?"

"No, most certainly not."

"I don't think we shall fall out again, Aunt Judith. We 've had too severe a lesson," said Roger Marcham, gravely, yet with a dawning

smile, as he saw the light in his darling's eyes. "It all arose out of a foolish child's imagination. But I think it would be safer to have you to look after us."

Aunt Judith was persuaded, and for the first time for many years the shop in Gisborne Street was shut up, and the customers had to go elsewhere for their "teas."

And when she once tasted the luxury and comfort of Underwood, it was not difficult to persuade her still further, and now she is a pillar in the house of Underwood, and the dear true friend of Roger Marcham and his happy wife. It is seldom they speak of the unhappy mistake which embittered so many months of their lives. The happiness of the present has quite wiped out that past bitterness. It was a serious lesson to Fred Wellesley, who is now a steady business man, happy in the house where Rosamond Tracy is a model wife and mother. Next to his own wife, he considers the sweet mistress of Underwood the best woman in the world, and Roger Marcham thinks the same, but does not admit of any exception whatsoever. As to Dorothy herself, I suppose I need scarcely say that she is a thousand times happier as Roger Marcham's wife than she was as Roger Marcham's ward.

THE END.